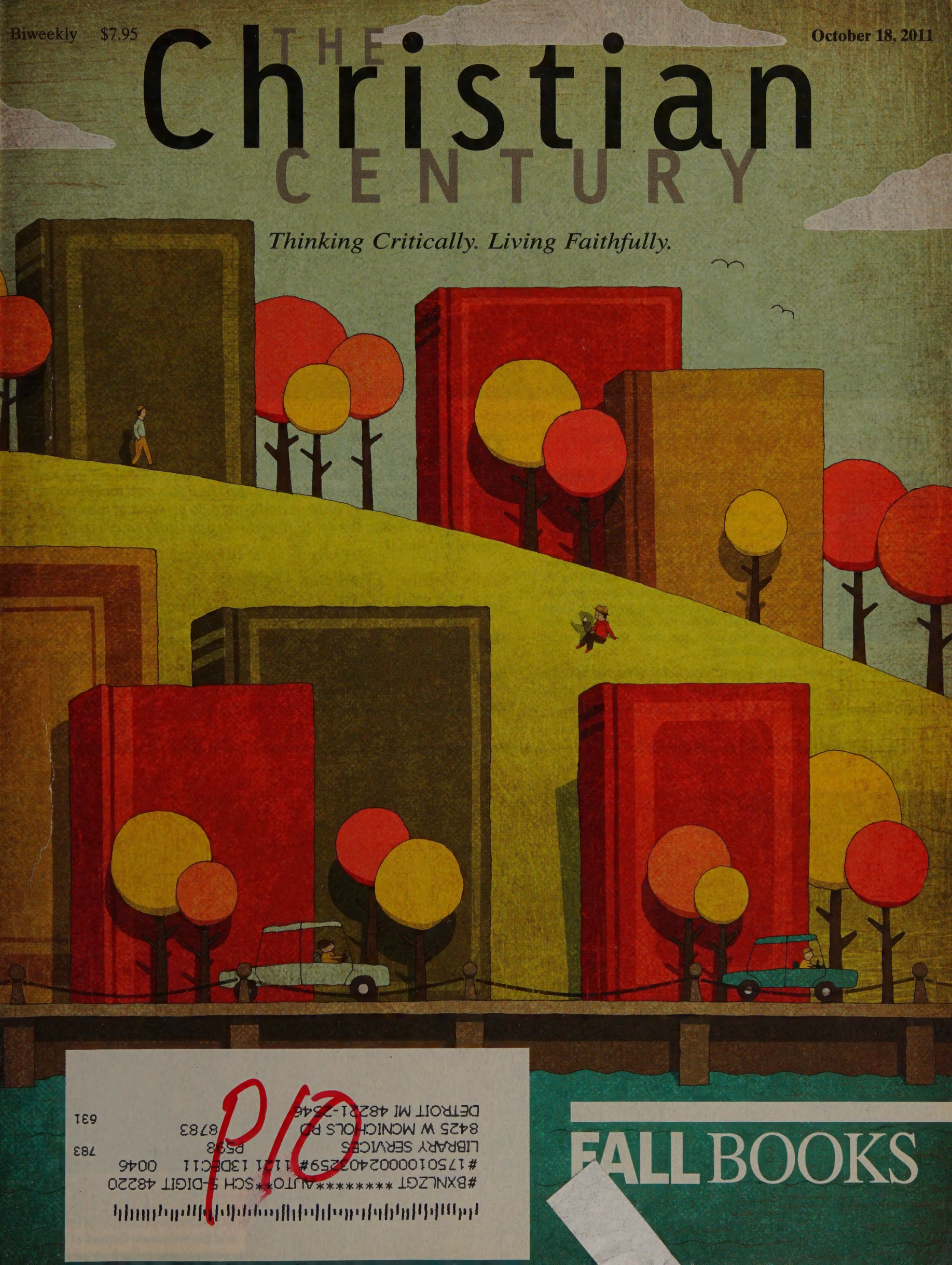


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FALL BOOKS



2012 WASHINGTON ISLAND FORUM

with Sara Miles

June 25–29, 2012



Sara Miles is the founder and director of the food pantry and director of ministry at Saint Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco. She is the author of *Jesus Freak: Feeding, Healing, Raising the Dead* and *Take This Bread: A Radical Conversion*. She is a noted speaker, preacher and workshop leader nationally and her writing has appeared in the *New York Times Magazine*, the *New Yorker*, and on National Public Radio.

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- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
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True sentences

THIS FALL I FOUND myself bypassing books that every working clergyperson should read in order to follow an impulse stimulated by Paula McLain's *The Paris Wife*, an account of Ernest Hemingway's Paris years in the 1920s as told in the voice of his first wife, Hadley. At one point, Hadley remembers Hemingway's mantra: "I want to write one true sentence. If I can write one sentence, simple and true, every day, I'll be satisfied." Hadley comments: "His ambitions for his writing were fierce and all encompassing. He had writing the way other people had religion."

I went on to read *A Moveable Feast*, Hemingway's account of his Paris years, and then *The Sun Also Rises*, the novel he wrote in Paris. The title comes from the Book of Ecclesiastes: "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh, but the earth abideth forever. . . . The sun also ariseth, and the sun also goeth down."

He describes the drama and ritual of bullfighting as well as the delights of food and drinking. A little bit of religion is included. Jake Barnes, the narrator, visits a Spanish cathedral, sees people praying, then kneels and prays. "I was a little

ashamed, and regretted that I was such a rotten Catholic. . . . It was a grand religion, and I only wished I felt religious and maybe I would the next time."

Not all literary critics agree about Hemingway's greatness, but almost all acknowledge that his spare, lean style changed American writing.

Right now I'm savoring Hemingway's short stories. He was a religious seeker if not some kind of believer. In the story "Today Is Friday," he imagines Roman soldiers who have just crucified a prisoner—clearly Jesus, although he is not named. They are drinking late at night and talking about the day's duty:

1st Soldier: He was pretty good in there today.

2nd Soldier: Why didn't he come down off the cross?

1st Soldier: He didn't want to come down off the cross . . .
He was pretty good in there today.

I like to think that one of the greatest 20th-century writers was haunted by Jesus, and by the idea of a God who was revealed in that singular life and death.

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Made-up religion?

I would have loved to hear the sermon on which Lillian Daniel's essay was based ("You can't make this up," Sept. 20). I laughed, I recognized people and encounters and conversations I have had, I was moved by the affirmation of a God whom we simply can't make up, a God who surprises us again and again—especially by working in and through the imperfect people in the church. Thank you for saying what the rest of us in ministry often think as we try not to roll our eyes.

*Faith Jongewaard
San Antonio, Tex.*

Yes, Lillian, you can make this up. I fondly remember ten years ago hearing Richard Holloway, retired bishop of Edinburgh (Church of Scotland), explain that "we made it all up." And of course, we—or rather our ancestors—did. Some of it is rather elegant, but in the 21st century I and many others have a bit of a problem with revelation and

things divine. If we made it all up, we can make it all up again. So we continue to find new meanings for the traditions, but we hope that we do so without doing harm, as so many have done before us. I do need to make it up for myself and with a community of other seekers.

*Dennis Maher
Lake Luzerne, N.Y.*

Relating to Jesus . . .

I applaud John Suk's criticism of the mantra that being Christian is synonymous with having a "personal relationship with God" ("A friend in Jesus?" Sept. 6). Indeed, he calls us out of the shallow end of the pool to our "tradition's deepest wells."

However, as one who grew up in one of our more cerebral mainline denominations, I wonder if Suk neglects part of the attractiveness of "personal relation-

ship" language: it invites some of us to live out our faith in a way in which God does not remain at arms length, frozen in the past or stuck in our heads. Personal relationships aren't just warm and fuzzy; they can be intense and demanding. As a Presbyterian pastor who rarely talks of a "personal relationship with Jesus," and then only with some serious unpacking, I nevertheless still hear in that evangelical phrase echoes of Søren Kierkegaard's dictum that "it is only in subjectivity that [Christianity's] truth exists, if it exists at all; objectively, Christianity has absolutely no existence."

When I join the psalmist and pray, "My soul thirsts for you," God moves from the display shelf to a position of engagement; God becomes more than an "observable," one more object to talk about, and becomes a subject whom I relate to and talk to. That feels like a relationship, one that is, I dare say, personal.

*Doug Kelly
Carlsbad, Calif.*

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Good investments

October 18, 2011

If I had only one wish for the next 50 years," said Bill Gates, "it would be to invent the thing that halves the cost of carbon dioxide." The founder of Microsoft went on: "We must innovate our way to zero CO² emissions."

Gates is thinking like an entrepreneur: he knows there are profits to be made from developing an energy technology that is half as expensive as drilling for carbon-based fuels. But he is also thinking like an environmentalist: he knows the globe can't bear the ecological cost of spewing more and more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

And more spewing is on the schedule. World energy consumption is likely to grow by more than 50 percent over the next 25 years, largely due to rapid development in China and India, where energy use is expected to double. It's estimated that 80 percent of energy consumption in 2035 will come from an old familiar source: fossil fuels. The use of clean energy sources is growing, but unless those sources become cheaper and more efficient, they won't put a dent in the rise in carbon emissions. The energy industry will keep investing in fossil fuels (like the ones buried in the Alberta tar pits, which Bill McKibben writes about on p. 10).

The need for technological breakthroughs is what prompted a Republican-controlled Congress in 2005 to offer loan guarantees to companies that are developing significant clean energy projects. That program came under attack last month after one participant, the solar energy company Solyndra, collapsed and left taxpayers the bill for a \$535 million loan guarantee. Critics complained that the Obama administration had rushed its approval of the company's application and that it did so to please a Solyndra investor who had raised money for the Obama campaign. If that is true, the administration deserves to be censured. The competitive integrity of any loan program must be assured.

But it would be a mistake to conclude, as some critics have, that such a program is misguided or that the government should drop its support for research and development in clean energy. To draw that lesson would be to forget that government-supported research spurred some of the most important technological developments of the age: computer software, microprocessors and the Internet, as well as a host of aviation and medical innovations. Bill Gates, famed inventor and entrepreneur that he is, acknowledges that it was government-supported research that laid the groundwork for the computer revolution that he led.

Perhaps there are better ways for the government to encourage clean power than by judging applications from private firms. Congress might enact an across-the-board tax on fossil fuels or impose a cap-and-trade policy that penalizes the burning of fossil fuels. Both those measures would create financial incentives for companies to seek alternative energy technologies. Unfortunately, over the years both measures have been considered by Congress and rejected.

Government-funded research has spurred major technological innovations and created jobs and entire industries along the way. Such research has usually been done in pursuit of a military purpose. It should be done today for the sake of jobs, economic growth—and a sustainable planet.

Alternative energy must become cheaper and more efficient.

CENTURY marks

A PENNY SAVED: Jane Ngoiri is a 38-year-old single mother, a prostitute-turned-businesswoman in Kenya. Having been nudged out of the family when her husband took a second wife, she turned to prostitution to support her children. She eventually joined an antipoverty organization called Jamii Bora (“good families” in Swahili), which encouraged her to save her money. From her savings she bought a sewing machine, using it to make two or three smaller dresses out of used wedding gowns. From her profits she bought a house in a safe neighborhood and sent her children to school. Microsaving is turning out to be more effective than microlending (Nicholas D. Kristof, *New York Times*, September 14).

KILLING THE DEATH PENALTY: In response to two executions on September 21, one in Georgia and the other in Texas, more than 200 Catholic

theologians have signed a petition calling for the end of the death penalty in the U.S. They speak a particular word to fellow Catholics: “The Eucharistic celebration calls Catholics to remember all crucified people, including the legacy of lynching, in light of the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ” (catholicmoraltheology.com).

A BIT OF PARSLEY: The U.S. Senate begins every session with a prayer, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. Then the partisan bickering ensues. The prayer is led by Chaplain Barry C. Black, a Seventh-day Adventist who rose to the rank of rear admiral as a navy chaplain. His prayers typically call for unity, respect for one another, and reconciliation. Black is not disturbed by the fact that the Senate rarely heeds his petitions. The rancorous speeches made on the floor of the Senate are usually prepared before he gives his opening prayer, he

says. Peter Marshall, Senate chaplain in the 1940s, says he was the equivalent of parsley—just there for decoration (*Washington Post*, September 21).

FOOD STUFF: Global food prices have spiked twice in the last three years largely for two reasons, according to a study released by the New England Complex Systems Institute: increasing diversion of grain to ethanol production and speculation in the commodities market. Ethanol this year will consume 40 percent of the U.S. corn crop, which constitutes 16 percent of world corn production. With the deregulation of commodity futures in 2000, the futures market has become another place for speculative investments, resulting in huge spikes in food commodities. The authors recommend two steps to bring down and stabilize food prices: restore financial regulations in the commodities market and end ethanol production. “There is a moral imperative,” says one of the authors of the paper (fast-company.com, September 22).

MORE STUFF: Compulsive consumerism has come to dominate British family life, according to a study done by UNICEF UK. One mother reported that she thought her three-year-old son would be bullied if he didn’t have a Nintendo DS games system at home. Parents are putting long hours into work and giving their children consumer goods as compensation. Children interviewed in the study said they would prefer more time with their parents. “We are probably the most secular society in the world, we do not have the counterbalance of religion,” says Sue Palmer, author of *Toxic Childhood*. From the time they are born children get the message that “the one



thing that matters is getting more stuff” (*Telegraph*, September 14).

LAND RUSH: Large swaths of land are being secretly bought up by international investors, especially in Africa, according to Oxfam. Much of this land is used for growing sugar cane and oil palm for biofuels rather than for growing food. In Mozambique, for instance, only 32,000 out of 433,000 hectares of land approved for sale between 2007 and 2009 were used for food crops. These land purchases by outside interests leave the former inhabitants without sufficient land to meet their own needs (*Guardian*, September 22).

IT’S ABOUT THE MONEY: Whenever it is suggested that collegiate athletes should get paid for their efforts, the National Collegiate Athletic Association claims that they are already getting paid through athletic scholarships. The NCAA wishes to protect the ideal of the amateur student-athlete. Many players in high-profile sports such as football and basketball come from impoverished backgrounds and don’t have the money to buy plane tickets home. The NCAA and its member schools have their own interests to protect. Last year the NCAA was paid \$771 million just for the television rights to the men’s basketball tournament. Universities with top-tier football programs earn between \$40 million and \$80 million in profits each year and pay coaches multimillion-dollar salaries (*Atlantic*, October).

CHAMPION THE VOTE: A group of venture capitalists is backing United in Purpose, a nonprofit organization that is trying to influence the outcome of the 2012 election by registering 5 million conservative Christians. Using a sophisticated data mining procedure, it is compiling a database of every unregistered evangelical, conservative Christian in the country. The organization’s Champion the Vote campaign has a website that lists right to life, religious freedom and traditional marriage as its top priorities. Technology entrepreneur Ken Eldred, one of its financial backers, says that one day God will ask people how they voted (*Chicago Tribune*, September 18).

“Do not weep for Troy Anthony Davis, he will be with God; weep for Georgia and for our nation. Capital punishment is barbaric.”

— Georgia Rep. John Lewis, on Davis’s execution by the state of Georgia. Davis claimed that he didn’t kill the policeman he was accused of killing, and a number of witnesses had recanted their testimony against Davis [dailykos.com, September 21].

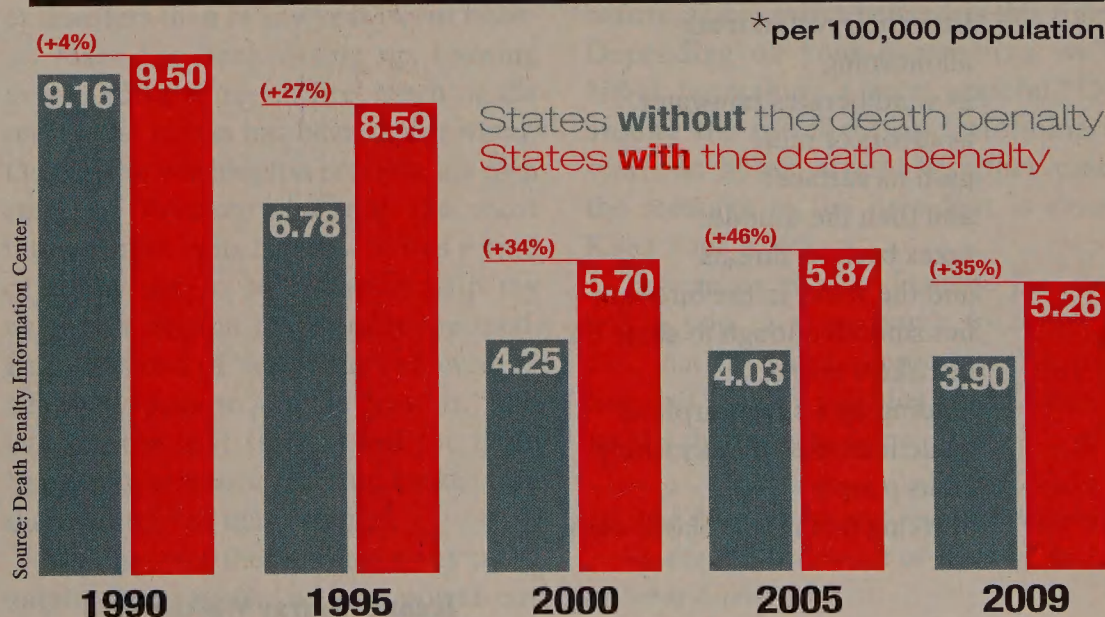
“There is nobody in this country who got rich on his own. Nobody. You built a factory out there? Good for you. But I want to be clear: you moved your goods to market on the roads the rest of us paid for; you hired workers the rest of us paid to educate; you were safe in your factory because of police forces and fire forces that the rest of us paid for. . . . You built a factory and it turned into something terrific . . .? God bless. Keep a big hunk of it. But part of the underlying social contract is you take a hunk of that and pay forward for the next kid who comes along.”

— Elizabeth Warren, who is running for the U.S. Senate from Massachusetts (*Washington Monthly*, September 21)

BACKLASH: By some estimates, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) contributed 40 percent of the money raised to combat Proposition 8 in California in 2008. The legislation overturned a California Supreme Court ruling that legalized same-sex marriage. A backlash against the LDS church for its support of Proposition 8 led one LDS leader to claim that Mormons are facing

unparalleled religious persecution, and he likened their situation to southern blacks during the civil rights era. In 2009, when the church supported measures in Salt Lake City that prohibited discrimination against gays in housing and employment, conservatives complained it was a public relations stunt in the wake of Proposition 8 backlash (*American Scholar*, Autumn).

Murder rates* and the death penalty



Pipeline to disaster

by Bill McKibben

SUNDAY MORNING in jail was harder than I had imagined it would be. For one thing, no one had slept much. The central cell block in the Washington, D.C., jail has steel slabs with no mattresses, no pillows, no sheets. It was stifling hot and noisy, and we were all hungry—we'd each been given one baloney sandwich over the last 18 hours. And we were uncertain what the future held. When we'd been arrested the day before in a peaceful environmental protest outside the White House, the best guess was that we'd be processed and released by nightfall. But the guards were saying (correctly as it turned out) that we'd be lucky to be out by Monday evening.

I could feel my own courage flagging a bit along with that of the 40 or so other men up and down our cell block. I knew we represented a very wide range of

faiths, including a pretty good showing for "none at all," so a regular church service was not in order. But for some reason I remembered one of my favorite spirituals. It's a classic call-and-response song, so simple that even someone who can't carry a tune can lead it: "Have you

movement (under much harsher conditions than we were facing). So here's how it sounded that morning in late August: "Have you been to the jailhouse? / Certainly, Lord" and "Have you been in cuffs? / Certainly, Lord" and "Would you do it again? / Certainly, Lord."

The oil in the Alberta sands should be left in the ground.

seen the Light? / Certainly, Lord / Have you seen the Light? / Certainly, Lord / Have you seen the Light? / Certainly, Lord / Certainly, certainly, certainly, Lord."

It's also endlessly adaptable, as singers demonstrated in the civil rights

Spare no sympathy for us. We got out eventually, and what we went through is nothing compared to what people in many communities in this country endure regularly. You can't even call us brave: we hadn't known what we were facing.

The brave people were the ones who showed up the next day, and the day after that—they knew what the risks were. Over two weeks, 1,253 people were arrested in what was the largest civil disobedience protest in several decades in this country. These were completely normal people, and most of them had never been arrested. (We asked demonstrators who had been president when they were born: the largest cohort came from the FDR and Truman years.)

Their protest was an expression of impatient love. For 20 years the world's scientists have been warning us about global warming. We've heard appeals from the National Academy and the Royal Academy and one collection of Nobel Prize-winning scientists after another. And nothing has happened except that our addiction to fossil fuel has grown deeper and more profound.

Birdbath

The tiny whitecaps
bare their rotten teeth
all morning
as wind berates rainwater,
as razors of rain
gash its surface
and then the thunder
takes back its threats
and the water in the birdbath
lies smooth enough to skate on,
lies like a mirror
holding up a silver airplane
while it crosses the sky safely,
all its people
drinking from their plastic cups.

Jeanne Murray Walker



PROTEST: Demonstrators gathered in front of the White House in Washington, D.C., in September to protest the Keystone XL Pipeline project in the U.S. and the Tar Sands Development in the province of Alberta in Canada.

So when news came out that President Obama would, by himself, get to approve or block the building of a giant pipeline linking Texas refineries to the tar sands of Alberta, some of us thought the time for more than words had finally arrived.

We should have been outraged about the tar sands long ago: mining them for oil has already moved more earth than the Great Wall of China and the Suez Canal, making life all but impossible for the native communities that have long inhabited the land. But it took an alert from another scientist—NASA’s James Hansen—to really get us going. His team calculated how much carbon actually lies in that pool of oil mixed with sand. The answer: it is the second largest reservoir of carbon on earth, second only to the oil fields of Saudi Arabia. Burning Saudi Arabia has already raised the temperature of the planet a degree. Knowing what we now know, it would be folly to repeat the operation in Canada. This oil should be left in the ground and the temptation to mine it avoided. If we

burn it all up, says Hansen, it’s “essentially game over for the climate.”

In our day, some of the signs of the times come from physicists and chemists. They’re the ones able to tell us what’s happening to creation—though increasingly our own eyes can do the trick. The year 2010 was the warmest year ever recorded on this planet. In 2011, before August was over, the U.S. had recorded more billion-dollar weather disasters than in any year in our history. Texas has been drying up, blowing away and catching on fire; much of the rest of the nation has been under water. During the Washington protests, my own state of Vermont endured the most intense rains in its history—it was a kind of agony not to be home to help my neighbors dig out from under the mud. But a busload of Vermonters showed up a few days later to join the protests. “Too late to stop that storm,” was the basic Yankee sentiment. “Better make sure there aren’t too many more.”


Making sure there aren’t many more entails changing the way we power our

lives, and that requires political action. If we just hook ourselves up to the next pool of oil, then it’s predictable that we won’t make the transition to solar and wind very fast. (There’s a reason they don’t hold AA meetings in liquor stores.) We needed to ask President Obama to make good on what he said during his campaign—like on the night he was nominated, when he said that in his administration “the rise of the oceans will begin to slow and the planet begin to heal.”

If you don’t mean it, you shouldn’t say it. We’ve all cut the president some slack because he’s dealing with a Congress that seems bent on substituting ideology for chemistry and physics—a Congress that seems certain that its laws can somehow upend the laws of creation. But when the president can do what needs doing all by himself—well, that’s when he has to act. He’ll either sign or reject a “presidential certificate of national interest” for the pipeline, and he’s said he’ll do it by year’s end.

It won’t be easy for him to turn it down. The forces on the other side are the most powerful on earth. (The fossil fuel industry makes more money than anything humans have ever done.) Which is why we’ve needed to find other currencies.

For a couple of weeks in August, we spent our bodies. Now we need to spend our spirit, our compassion, our feeling for the future. On November 6—exactly one year before the presidential election—some of us will spend the afternoon circling the White House. I’m not sure that’s ever been done before. There won’t be arrests this time. Depending on your perspective, we’ll either be making a giant hopeful “O” around the president or performing a symbolic house arrest. In either case, the message to the president is clear: Keep your word.

November 6 is a Sunday. I’m not telling you to skip church to come to D.C. that day. But I can promise that, just like that Sunday morning in jail, church will be there if you come. 

Bill McKibben, author and sometime Methodist Sunday school teacher, is an organizer for Tar Sands Action.

Oxford University Press

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'Protestant ethic' still sways dreams of wealth

Back in 1905, Max Weber's landmark treatise, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, argued that a Calvinist belief in God's plan for the saved was crucial to the rise of capitalism because it inspired individuals to work hard and earn money as a sign of divine blessing on their lives.

More than a century later, new research shows that whatever its merits, the Protestant ethic is thriving among American believers.

That's especially true among the evangelicals who are driving today's economic conservatism, and the idea goes a long way toward explaining the political disputes that are dividing the country and shaping the presidential campaign.

According to the Baylor Religion Survey released September 20, nearly three-quarters of Americans believe that God has a plan for their lives, and those who hold strongly to those beliefs—about four in ten—are much more likely to embrace the sort of conservative economic philosophy that would make Tea Party activists proud.

In fact, believers who say God is directly guiding their lives and endowing the U.S. with divine blessings are much more likely than other Americans to agree that "the government does too much" and that "able-bodied people who are out of work shouldn't receive unemployment checks." What's more, they are more than twice as likely as all other Americans to say that success "is achieved by ability rather than luck."

The Baylor study, based on interviews with more than 1,700 adults last fall, shows that black Protestants are most likely to espouse these ideas (71 percent), followed by evangelicals at 55 percent. Catholics and mainline Protestants are well behind, at about 42 percent, trailed by unaffiliated believers

and Jews, who come in at around 3 percent.

Baylor sociologist Paul Froese noted that today's economic Protestantism seems to channel the free-market ideas of Adam Smith, the famous 18th-century moral philosopher who developed the theory of an "invisible hand" of competition, and the more recent libertarian views of the late University of Chicago economist Milton Friedman.

One major caveat emerges, however: Froese noted that American believers add an important religious gloss to these market-driven theories by arguing that God is tipping the scales in the favor of hard-



working true believers. "For many Americans, the invisible hand of Adam Smith has become God's hand," Froese said.

This kind of economic theology is being trumpeted most effectively by the Republican Party, especially GOP presidential hopefuls Rick Perry and Michele Bachmann. "Political candidates can promote economic conservatism and a lack of government regulation merely by referring to an engaged God," Froese said. "It works because many rank-and-file voters believe that a lack of government regulation and lower taxes is part of God's plan."

This approach also works politically because, contrary to what one might expect, Americans with lower incomes and less education are more likely to believe that God has a plan for their lives—and that when it comes to the economy, the

best government is that which governs least. (African-American Protestants are an exception to the trend, believing in both God's guiding hand and a strong role for government.)

For example, 41 percent of respondents said they "strongly believe" that God has a plan for them, but just 17 percent of respondents with incomes of more than \$100,000 hold such a belief.

That kind of populist optimism, adhered to in spite of today's deepening economic misery, was also demonstrated by a recent Associated Press-CNBC survey that found that two in ten Americans think they will be millionaires in the next decade. That conviction increases the further one moves down the economic ladder—and thus the lower one's actual chances of achieving such financial nirvana.

Critics view these attitudes as a kind of magical thinking that opens the most financially vulnerable people to the pitches of "prosperity gospel" preachers who use cable television pulpits to solicit donations that they say will bring their viewers economic blessings.

But the popularity of this "gospel of wealth" could also play out in the budget showdown in Washington as President Obama tries to win reelection on a platform of economic "fairness" (which for him means higher taxes on the wealthy along with budget cuts). Republicans, on the other hand, are raising the red flag of "class warfare" in opposing the president's plans—in effect defending the wealthy at a time of near-recession and growing economic inequality.

That message could yet work for the GOP if enough middle- and working-class Americans believe that they, too, will be in that upper-income echelon sooner rather than later and that God will help them get there—as long as Washington doesn't get in the way. —David Gibson, RNS

Conservative Christians rush to Rick Perry's side

From media mavens to grassroots activists, conservative Christian leaders have been heaping praise on presidential candidate Rick Perry, an early but important show of support from a vital GOP constituency.

Initially unimpressed with the 2012 presidential field, some of these evangelicals heralded Perry's late entry as the second coming of Ronald Reagan. Like Reagan, they say, Perry is a big-state governor, a staunch conservative and, significantly, a fellow Christian.

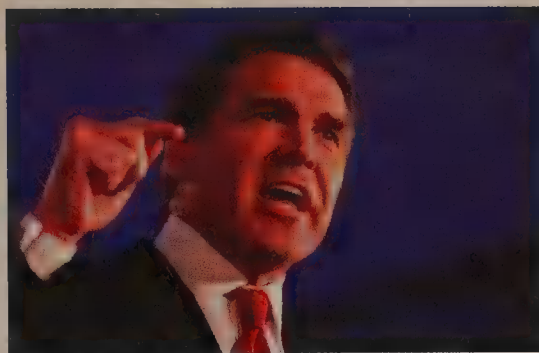
Perry, in turn, has suffused his campaign with religion, building on strategies honed for years in Texas politics. He has huddled with social conservatives at a Texas retreat, hosted a high-profile Christian prayer rally in Houston and recited his prodigal-son spiritual testimony at the late Jerry Falwell's Liberty University.

On September 20, Perry said his Christian faith includes a "clear directive" to support Israel—a view shared by many evangelicals, who believe that God gave the land to the Jewish people. Early returns suggest that the Texas governor's efforts were paying off, particularly among elder evangelical statesmen:

- Donald E. Wildmon, founder and former head of the American Family Association, is endorsing Perry. The Mississippi-based AFA organized and spent \$600,000 to finance Perry's prayer rally, called "The Response," and later it directed its 30,000 participants to a new Christian voter-registration campaign. "I think the overwhelming majority of what's often called the religious right will support the governor," said Wildmon, whose organization boasts a mailing list of 60,000 pastors and operates 180 radio stations. "I'm going to do whatever I can to help the man get elected."

- Former Focus on the Family head James Dobson has gushed over Perry on his new radio show, calling him a "deeply committed Christian" and a courageous leader. Dobson helped organize The Response and reportedly will appear with Perry at an October event in Orlando.

- Liberty University chancellor Jerry



"REAL DEAL" FOR RELIGIOUS RIGHT? *Texas governor Rick Perry has drawn the support of several evangelical leaders within the conservative movement.*

Falwell Jr. has mused that Perry could be another Reagan and called him "one of the most pro-life governors in American history." Falwell also said he admires the governor's "guts" for suggesting that Texas could secede from the union.

- Evangelical historian and activist David Barton, a longtime Perry ally, has circulated a 14-point defense of the governor's record on economic, social and immigration issues.

- Southern Baptist leader Richard Land has penned an op-ed that portrays Perry as shrewd, deeply conservative and a lifelong evangelical of "genuine" faith. (Perry's own account differs slightly. He says he was spiritually lost as a young man before turning to God at age 27.)

- Grassroots activist David Lane, who organized "pastor policy briefings" featuring Perry during his 2006 campaign for governor, is reportedly planning similar events in battleground states, including one in Florida this fall. Lane was finance chairman of The Response. "I'd be very surprised if the emergence of David Lane's projects in several states was about anything other than supporting Gov. Perry," said Kathy Miller, president of the Texas Freedom Network, a watchdog group that has monitored Perry's ties to conservatives for years.

In addition, Perry has been invited to appear with Dobson and Barton at a November 12 event called "One Nation Under God" that is intended to teach Christians to see "history and current events in light of God's Word, and how to take action that aligns with his truth."

Conservative evangelical leaders desperately want to deny President Obama a second term, said Doug Wead, a veteran GOP strategist and senior adviser to Ron

Paul's presidential campaign. "And they decided early that Perry is their best shot," he said.

The conservative Christian movement is less top-down than many in the media suspect, said John C. Green, an expert on religion and politics at the University of Akron in Ohio. But grassroots activists take note when evangelical eminences like Dobson praise a particular candidate. "Lots of conservative Christians still take cues from these individuals," Green said.

If they unite behind a candidate, evangelicals can have a huge electoral impact, especially in key states like Iowa and South Carolina, where they constitute nearly half of all GOP voters, said Green.

Perry's very public "I once was lost, but now I'm found" spiritual speech at Liberty University September 14 got the media's attention, but it was his confab at a secluded Texas ranch in August that impressed the religious right heavyweights, said Land. More than 200 social conservatives were there—from black Pentecostals to conservative Catholics to Latino evangelicals, according to Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

"The general feeling people came away with is that this guy is the real deal," said Land, who attended. "I don't see how the meeting could have gone any better for Perry."

[Nevertheless, "electability" in the general election next year is still an issue. A GOP panel discussion on Fox News Channel September 25 heavily criticized Perry after long-shot candidate Herman Cain easily won a Florida straw vote held after a poor debate performance by Perry.]

Mark DeMoss, who heads a Christian public relations agency and advises Mitt Romney's campaign, said he is not surprised that many evangelical leaders back Perry. "A significant number of evangelicals have always wanted, above anything else in their candidate, someone who shares their Christian faith and theology, and apparently Gov. Perry does," DeMoss said.

However, DeMoss added, it is too early in the campaign to declare Perry the GOP's Chosen One. "Gov. Perry is only just beginning to be vetted on the national stage," DeMoss said. "The dynamics are changing almost weekly." —Daniel Burke, RNS

UMC bishops warned of clergy planning to bless gay unions

A United Methodist group of large-church pastors, joined by hundreds of petition-signing clergy and laity, are urging the denomination's bishops to issue a collective warning to some 900 "defiant" clergy who have declared their intention to bless same-sex unions or marriages.

The Council of Bishops, which opens a four-day meeting October 31 in North Carolina, was asked by the pastors group to issue a public statement affirming the decades-old restrictions. The UMC says the "practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching" and bars Methodist churches from hosting or officiating at "ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions."

Pastor Ed Robb III, senior pastor of the 9,200-member Woodlands United Methodist Church near Houston, and four other Bible Belt pastors wrote the letter to the bishops after discussing the idea early in September at a gathering of senior pastors from the 100 largest U.S. Methodist congregations, reported United Methodist News Service. The four original signers were joined in the statement by 54 more clergy.

As of September 26, the online clergy letter to the bishops (faithfulumc.com) had 1,523 signers, and a letter from lay Methodists urging strong penalties for offenders had 4,388 signatures.

The United Methodist Church in the U.S. has about 7.8 million members and nearly 17,000 active ordained clergy, according to Lovett Weems Jr. of the Lewis Center for Church Leadership at Wesley Theological Seminary.

The clergy movement to offer church blessings or marriage to any couple, including same-sex pairs, began in Minnesota this spring when 70 ministers stated their willingness to risk penalties. Clergy in at least four other regions subsequently signed similar statements.

The General Conference, the highest legislative body of the UMC, has debated gay issues every four years since 1972. Chances are slim, most analysts say, that

the 2012 General Conference April 24–May 4 will be open to same-sex blessings. Delegates generally opposed to a change are growing higher in ratio—a steady trend because of the booming growth in churches abroad that are strongly opposed to any changes.

Some advocates of change have looked to UMC judicial decisions for remedies. The laity letter to the bishops complained that present law "gives juries in church trials a great deal of discretion in determining penalties, including defrocking, suspension or a lesser penalty." But decisions by church courts on clergy accused of violating Methodist rules on gay-related issues have had mixed results for progressive advocates.

The risk-taking steps were sparked by Bruce Robbins, pastor of Hennepin Avenue UMC in Minneapolis. Robbins told United Methodist News Service that faithful ministers sympathetic to committed same-sex partners are caught in a dilemma between two covenants.

The Methodist Book of Discipline, or law book, "calls us for inclusiveness and

recognizing the sacred worth of all persons, and then places prohibitions that we deeply believe are prejudicial and unjust," said Robbins, a former top executive of the Methodists' Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns. He noted that the denomination has corrected its moral course "when people have been excluded before, such as women in ordination and the permissiveness on slavery."

But the clergy appeal to the Council of Bishops countered that "this group of defiant clergy" will lead many church members to decide that it is "time for them to find another church."

"What Dr. Robbins and others are proposing will lead to anarchy," the letter concluded. It further suggested that if "massive acts of ecclesiastical disobedience" occur, the advocates may be hoping that the UMC "will not possess the resources or the resolve to enforce the church's position."

Bishop Larry M. Goodpaster, president of the Council of Bishops, said the council's executive committee will meet first to decide if the full council should make a full response. —John Dart

Southern Baptist leader suggests name change

DOES THE Southern Baptist Convention need a new name? The president of the nation's largest Protestant denomination, Bryant Wright, who is also a pastor in Marietta, Georgia, says the idea should be explored again for the sake of evangelistic success alone.

"The name 'Southern' really no longer reflects who we are as a convention in reaching all of North America," Wright said in a video posted on the Pray4SBC.com website. He added that the word doesn't play well in places like Boston, New York, Idaho, Wyoming and Michigan. "With 'Southern' in the name, it's really a barrier in seeking to do ministry in areas like that," he said.

Wright's plans, announced at a SBC Executive Committee meeting September 19, sparked debate, according to Baptist Press, the denomination's news outlet. Some committee members said the plan should be reviewed by lawyers or voted on first by Baptists at their annu-

al meeting next June, but both recommendations were voted down.

Wright said any recommended name change would need to be approved at two consecutive annual meetings of the denomination, which has been grappling with stagnant baptism rates and declining membership.

Southern Baptists have debated a possible name change numerous times before. At their 2004 annual meeting, 55 percent of voters defeated a measure that would have set up a committee to study the matter.

In a 2008 poll by SBC-affiliated LifeWay Research, 27 percent of Southern Baptist pastors agreed that the name "Southern" is a "hindrance" while 68 percent disagreed.

Wright appointed Jimmy Draper, who led the SBC Sunday School Board in 1998 when it became LifeWay Christian Resources, to lead the study committee. —RNS

Atheists target clergy's tax break for housing

A long-standing tax break for clergy and other “ministers of the gospel” is facing the lastest in a string of challenges in federal court. The Wisconsin-based Freedom from Religion Foundation filed suit September 13 to challenge the constitutionality of tax deductions that clergy are allowed to claim on their housing expenses.

The tax break, called a parish exemption, allows clergy to deduct income that is designated as a housing allowance, including rental payments and mortgage interest. Such allowances are a common way for religious congregations to boost the value of modest clergy salaries.

The suit names Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner and Internal Revenue Service Commissioner Douglas Shulman. The plaintiffs are Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor, copresidents of FFRF, and Anne Nicol Gaylor, a past president and cofounder. Annie Laurie Gaylor is executive editor of *Freethought Today*.

All three plaintiffs receive part of their salaries as housing allowances but do not qualify for the tax exemption because they are not clergy. That amounts to an unconstitutional government endorsement of religion, they claim, because the parish exemption aids and subsidizes religion by providing ministers with financial benefits not given to secular workers.

“The government is preferring ministers of the gospel over those of us who think religion should be, if not eliminated, limited,” said Barker. A former ordained minister, Barker has claimed the exemption in the past.

Grant Williams, a spokesman for the Internal Revenue Service, declined to comment on any pending litigation.

The parish exemption entered the tax code in 1954, the same year the phrase “under God” was added to the Pledge of Allegiance. The country was deep in the cold war, and providing clergy with a tax break was seen as reinforcing religiosity in the fight against godless communism.

There have been several challenges to the parish exemption in recent years. In 1996, the IRS denied megachurch pastor Rick Warren a \$79,999 deduction he claimed under the law, but he won on appeal. In 2002, Congress passed the Clergy Housing Allowance Clarification Act to protect the parish exemption but limited it to the fair-market rental value of a home.

The FFRF filed a similar suit in 2009 in California but withdrew it earlier this year out of concern that the plaintiff's legal standing—as a taxpayer—was not strong enough. After the FFRF began awarding all three plaintiffs a housing allowance within the past year to improve their standing in the case, they hope the new suit demonstrates that they suffer serious financial injury when they are denied the exemption. —Kimberly Winston, RNS

Atheists, mostly male, show sexist side

Rebecca Watson meant it as a funny story, almost an aside. In a video blog, the popular skeptic blogger recalled a man following her into an empty elevator and inviting her up to his room after she spoke about feminism at a European atheist conference last June.

Watson told of rebuffing the advance with a bit of a laugh. Her blog and other atheist/skeptic blogs were soon flooded with comments. Many women told of receiving unwanted sexual advances at freethinker gatherings. Some men, meanwhile, ridiculed Watson as overly sensitive or worse—or threatened her with rape, mutilation and murder.

“I thought it was a safe space,” Watson said of the freethought community. “The biggest lesson I have learned over the years is that it is not a safe space and we have a lot of growing to do.”

Before she knew it, Watson, 30, was subsumed by what everyone now calls “Elevorgate.” And when best-selling atheist author Richard Dawkins chimed in, the incident went nuclear.

“Stop whining, will you,” Dawkins wrote in one of three comments on Pharyngula, a popular freethinker blog,



RNS / AMBER ARNOLD

MAKING ROOM FOR WOMEN: Annie Laurie Gaylor is copresident of the Wisconsin-based Freedom from Religion Foundation, one of the few atheist/freethought organizations staffed mostly by women.

contrasting her experience with that of a fictional Muslim woman who had been beaten by her husband and genitally mutilated. “For goodness’ sake grow up, or at least grow a thicker skin.”

Now, months after “Elevorgate” erupted, freethinkers are assessing its meaning. Many acknowledge that they have a “woman problem”—men outnumber women at atheist gatherings, both at the podium and in the audiences.

Yet many, including Watson, say Elevorgate is less a calamity and more an opportunity to welcome women and other minorities into a community that's long been dominated by white men. “The majority of e-mails I have gotten have been from men who said, ‘I had no idea what women in this community went through, and thank you for opening my eyes,’” Watson said. “There has actually been a net benefit coming out of this that I think has made everything worthwhile.”

No one is suggesting that the freethought community is more sexist than other segments of society—after all, the most famous American atheist, the

late Madalyn Murray O'Hair, was a woman.

Nonetheless, the incident has struck a chord, perhaps because atheists and other skeptics pride themselves on reason and logic—intellectual exercises that theoretically lead to convictions about equality. The problem, they agree, is long-standing. Women veterans of the movement recall meetings in the 1970s where 80 percent of attendees were men.

"I think the essential problem that women have in the movement is that they are greatly outnumbered," said Susan Jacoby, author of *Freethinkers*. "When you talk about women atheists, there is less of a pool than men. Women are more religious than men, therefore there are fewer women active in this movement than there are men."

But that is slowly changing. The 2008 American Religious Identification Survey found a 60-40 percent breakdown among men and women who say they have no religion. Yet women make up 52 percent of the broader population.

Annie Laurie Gaylor, copresident of the Freedom from Religion Foundation, notes that while men might fill their gatherings, women often lead freethought organizations. She has directed FFRF's local chapters to use more women—at least 50 percent—in their billboard and bus banner ads. "We want to be proactive and make sure there is diversity," she said. "The movement is big enough now."

That aim is reflected in a new "Women in Secularism" conference announced in August by the Center for Inquiry. The conference, billed as the first of its kind, will be held in May in Washington, D.C., and will feature an all-female lineup.

"A lot of us think it is long overdue," said Melody Hensley, executive director of the center's Washington office and organizer of the event, which will include Jacoby, Watson and Gaylor. "If you have women leaders, you are going to have more women. So this conference is a step forward to attract more women to the cause." —Kimberly Winston, RNS

Bishop claims Iran visit helped to release hikers

The release in September of U.S. hikers Shane Bauer and Joshua Fattal from an Iranian prison "affirms the importance of the role of religious dialogue and its end product in this case, public diplomacy," according to Episcopal bishop John Chane of Washington, D.C.

A delegation of Christian and Muslim leaders had traveled to Iran at the invitation of Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to "seek ways to define common ground between our two countries," as Chane put it. One objective of the weeklong trip was to seek the release of the hikers on humanitarian grounds, reported Episcopal News Service.

The delegation, which returned September 19, included Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick, former leader of the Archdiocese of Washington, and Nihad Awad and Larry Shaw, national executive director and board chairman respectively of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR).

Chane said September 21 that the hikers' release "reaffirms the promises made during our conversations with the president of Iran and representatives of the Iranian foreign ministry. . . . I look forward to good conversations with representatives of our government with the hope that it finds a way to address the Iranians' concern for their citizens who are currently in detention in the United States."

In reporting on the two men's freedom, however, U.S. newspapers tended to point to the political rivalries within Iran. Ahmadinejad had vowed to release the 29-year-old men before his scheduled speech to the UN General Assembly. Iranian judges rejected the Iranian president's plan at the last minute, but \$1 million in bail from the Gulf state of Oman, a U.S. ally, appeared to play a part in the events, according to the *Los Angeles Times*.

Bauer and Fattal were arrested, along with Sarah Shourd, on July 31, 2009, and accused of spying. Shourd was released on bail in September 2010 for medical reasons and left Iran. In August, Bauer

Papal trip disappointing to German Protestants

POPE BENEDICT XVI'S recent visit to Germany featured an ecumenical worship service in the town of Erfurt that was meant to reach out to German Protestants, but for many it felt like a missed opportunity.

In his September 23 sermon, Benedict said that "there was some talk of an 'ecumenical gift' which was expected from this visit. . . . Here I would only say that this reflects a political misreading of faith and of ecumenism." The Christian faiths, he said, could not negotiate and compromise as if they were political states.

"Faith is not something we work out intellectually or negotiate between us," he said. "It is the foundation for our lives. Unity grows not by the weighing of benefits and drawbacks but only by entering ever more deeply into the faith in our thoughts and in our lives."

Many were disappointed there was no indication that the pope intended to relax a ban on Catholics and Prot-

estants taking communion together or recognize Protestant denominations as "true churches" as opposed to "ecclesial communities."

"I think we all had high expectations which weren't met during his trip," said Tabea Doelker, a member of the council of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) who attended the Erfurt service. (The EKD is the German federation of Protestant churches.) "I don't know if the pope, due to his age and fragility, will be able to carry out the task of bringing Catholicism and Protestantism closer together," she said in an interview. Benedict is 84.

Although Benedict met with Protestant leaders at the Augustinian Monastery where Protestant Reformation pioneer Martin Luther studied, EKD president Nikolaus Schneider said the encounter left hearts "burning for more." Schneider described the meeting as a "very serious and deep fraternal encounter." —ENInews

and Fattal were sentenced to eight years in prison.

CAIR's Awad said the interfaith delegation's trip to Iran offered "a positive example of bridge-building initiatives."
—ENInews

Hungary returns churches, but most are in bad shape

A Hungarian church leader has welcomed the fulfillment of state pledges to restore church properties to religious communities six decades after they were confiscated by the country's communist regime. "This is the only area of church-state relations which has gone well in recent years. The process was transparent and well managed," said Zoltan Tarr, general secretary of the Reformed Church of Hungary.

Refurbishing the neglected or ruined buildings is the downside, however. "While it's been important spiritually and emotionally for local communities to get back buildings they constructed with their own money, they weren't well looked after, and the vast majority are now in poor shape. Refurbishing them to modern needs will pose a heavy burden on the churches."

The Calvinist pastor was speaking as the center-right government of premier Viktor Orbán prepared to complete handover of the properties or pay compensation for those still in state hands by the end of the year.

Tarr said in a mid-September interview that procedures for returning church properties had been "very precisely set out" in the early 1990s. He added, however, that the restitution process covered only church assets used for public services. Churches would continue to rely on state subsidies until the future of communist-seized church lands was also negotiated.

"It isn't right, in theory, for the state to support the churches, but we can't manage without this since the assets which sustained our social activities were taken away," Tarr said.

"It's unlikely churches like ours will get back all of these assets, and it

doesn't want them anyway, since times have changed and this isn't how churches function now. We have precise records of what we owned, and it should feature in discussions about future state financing."

Hungarian churches submitted ownership claims to around 7,000 confiscated properties after the 1989 collapse of communist rule. Under a 1997 treaty with the Vatican, the Roman Catholic Church, which owned a third of all arable land before 1948, was to receive back properties up to a value of \$462 million by the end of 2011.

Similar arrangements were reached with the Reformed Church of Hungary and other denominations. The treaty also allowed church schools to receive the same subsidies as their state-owned

counterparts, and church members to assign 1 percent of taxes to their denomination, with annual donations topped up by the government.

Tarr said many church communities had counted on reopening schools and mission activities in their original buildings, but he added that many had been handed back "practically ruined," often with even their windows and wiring removed.

"Some communities were wise enough to ask not for the buildings but the equivalent value in money instead," said the Reformed Church general secretary. "In some cases, though, the attachment was so strong they desperately wanted the original properties. These will now need a lot of church money" for maintenance. —Jonathan Luxmoore, ENInews

People

■ Megachurch pastor **Rob Bell**, who stirred evangelical objections this year with a best-selling book, *Love Wins*, in which he said hell does not include eternal torment, is leaving Mars Hill Bible Church in Grandville, Michigan, in December. "Our founding pastor, Rob Bell, has decided to leave Mars Hill in order to devote his full energy to sharing the message of God's love with a broader audience," the church said in a statement September 22. Bell's resignation makes him the latest in a string of celebrity pastors who have said goodbye to weekly sermons, potluck dinners and other staples of church life. Authors Brian McLaren (*A New Kind of Christianity*), Francis Chan (*Crazy Love*) and Jim Belcher (*Deep Church*) have all left their church leadership positions in recent years. Some big-church pastors question such moves. Best-selling author and Saddleback Church Pastor Rick Warren was quickly on Twitter, saying pastors who leave churches have less impact and no base for credibility. As Bell said his goodbyes to the church where he drew 10,000 each Sunday, he said that he and his family are moving to Los Angeles where he will write "at least three more books."

■ **Ann Rodgers**, an award-winning reporter at the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* since 1988, is the new president of the Religion Newswriters Association, succeeding Steve Maynard, who has covered religion for more than 30 years at the *News Tribune* in Tacoma, Washington. Winning top awards, for religion news reporting at the RNA's 2011 meeting in Durham, North Carolina, September 15–18, were Michelle Boorstein of the *Washington Post*, Tim Townsend of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and Bob Smietana of the *Tennessean* in Nashville.

■ Church leaders in Kenya paid tribute to **Wangari Maathai**, 71, the first African woman Nobel Peace Prize winner, who died in Nairobi on September 25, as a person who cared for God's creation through campaigning for environmental protection. "She volunteered mentally and physically to save God's creation through her conservation efforts. She gave many trees to our church to plant," said David Gathanju, moderator of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa. Maathai was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 for her contributions to sustainable development, democracy and peace.

LIVING BY The Word

Sunday, October 23
Leviticus 12:1-12

WHEN I HELD my first grandchild in my arms, my perception of time was transformed. I began to ponder what his life would be like. I reflected on how it would be shaped by our responses to the challenges we are facing today—global climate change, economic uncertainty, nanosecond technology and the eclipse of the American empire. I realized that as a grandparent I will have to do my best to ensure that the world will become a safe and healthy place for my grandson and all the other children born in 2010. In an interdependent universe, after all, there are hardly any private actions; everything we do reverberates across the planet. What we do in the present shapes the future and the futures of those who follow us. We are always planting seeds for fruit that we will never harvest.

Yet the majority of our personal and corporate decisions are made with little consideration of their impact on generations to come. Businesses, institutions, governmental bodies and individuals have short ethical attention spans. For many of our leaders, the moral arc of responsibility goes no further than the next quarterly report, the next bottom line or the quick fix of a serious issue. Decisions are not made with the well-being of future generations in mind. Instead, shortsightedness coupled with self-interest and greed is a significant factor in today's economic and ecological crises.

Morality is involved in every important personal, congregational and political decision we make. We should always ask: Will our decisions give our children and grandchildren a sustainable planet? Will our congregational and denominational priorities help our youth grow in wisdom, stature and spirituality? With Mother Teresa, we should ask ourselves if we're doing something beautiful for God in what we do today.

The lectionary reading describes Moses' final days. God gives Moses a panoramic vision of the land that had inspired his dreams and projects for over 40 years. Ever since his first encounter with God through a burning bush, Moses' long-term plans and day-to-day decisions had been shaped by the vision of a land that offered abundance and security. He challenged his people's waywardness and guided their journey through the wilderness. Most important, he looked beyond his own lifetime to secure the well-being of generations to come.

Although Moses had been faithful to his vision, he was not allowed to enter the land that had been promised to Abraham, Sarah and their descendants. He had to pass the torch to others; he himself would never taste the milk and honey that he had promised the children of Israel. Perhaps Moses was conflicted

as he pondered his mortality. No doubt he wanted to kneel and kiss the soil of his spiritual homeland. But he may also have realized that he no longer had the energy to lead the people or deal with the complexities of governing the new land.

Letting go of control and allowing others to continue our work is an act of trust in God's ability to work creatively in the lives of our successors. Recently I left a seminary position after having created several successful programs in pastoral excellence and theological education. I found it difficult to let go of leadership and struggled to imagine these programs continuing with the same energy and care that I had given them. But I took comfort in knowing that my successor was a capable leader. Surely that's how Moses felt about Joshua. The new leader would learn as he went along and would guide the people in ways that both built upon and exceeded the achievements of Moses.

Over the years I have convened groups for pastors who are preparing for retirement. I know from being part of these groups that it's extremely difficult for pastors to let go of congregations they have loved and relationships that are dear to them. Sadly, some retired pastors remain on the scene. Often they create problems for their successors by insisting on a role in shaping their former congregation's future. But healthy ministry requires that they and we let go of the past and move on to our next adventures, trusting that God will make a way for our successors and for us.

Some pastors are exceptional in their gracefulness to those who follow them. A pastor friend of mine recently moved to a new congregation. His predecessor shared his wisdom with my friend and answered questions about the congregation and its members. The older man had no desire to shape his successor's ministry. Instead he blessed my friend, telling the new pastor that he would go to places that the older man had not imagined and shape the church in new ways. Then he let go, trusting the future to God's care and my friend's faithfulness.

There is a great deal of wisdom in a saying attributed to Martin Luther: "Even if I knew the world would end tomorrow, I would still plant a tree today." Moses died inspired by a mystical vision of his people's future. The certainty that God would continue to care for his people was enough for him: he had planted seeds that others would harvest.

Yes, the future is unclear at every level—congregational, national and planetary. We may not make it to our promised lands. But our calling is to plant trees of justice and beauty anyway. Like Moses, we need a vision to help us let go of the future while living responsibly in the present. Our faithful attentiveness to futures that we won't be part of is essential. As God's companions, our role is to commit ourselves to *tikkun olam*, mending the world.

Reflections on the lectionary

Sunday, October 30
Micah 3:5-12

AFRICAN-AMERICAN MYSTIC and spiritual leader Howard Thurman recalls being caught in a summer thunderstorm as a young boy. As he filled his bucket and mouth with delicious berries and plunged deeper into the forest, he neglected to notice the storm that was forming on the horizon. Then he heard crashes of thunder. Suddenly he realized that he was lost. With darkness enveloping him, he panicked and began to run. Then he remembered a bit of family wisdom: when you're lost, stop and be still, then look around and listen. Young Thurman stood still, observing the lightning strikes illuminating the landscape—looking left then right, backward and then forward. At last he saw something familiar. With each new lightning strike, he walked a few paces closer to his destination until he found his way home, guided by the storm that had frightened him.

When we're lost in the darkness, our only hope is to stop for a moment and look for the light. As Gerald May notes in his description of the spiritual life, finding your way through the wilderness of life involves pausing, noticing, opening, stretching, yielding and, I would add, responding. But first we need to know that we're lost. We need to take a long look at ourselves and consider where our current values and behaviors have led us. The problem with the prophets Micah describes is a duplicity that's grounded in an astounding lack of self-awareness. Content with their own affluence, these prophets assume that the nation of Israel as a whole reflects their well-being. They speak of peace from a place of prosperity and are unable and unwilling to see the pain of the homeless, dispossessed, unemployed and vulnerable. Their own security buffers them from others. Though they see themselves as generous to those at the margins, their attitudes and behaviors actually wage war on the hungry and powerless.

The false prophets can't see the connection between their behavior and others' poverty and despair. Their inability to empathize displays their apathy, their inability to experience and share God's revealing word. They go through the motions of pronouncing spiritual wisdom, but their words are hollow and irrelevant. Like the wealthy and powerful families described in Amos 8:11–12, an inability to hear the cries of the poor will bring "a famine . . . of hearing the word of God." People will run from one soothsayer to another seeking wisdom, but will find none.

Micah suggests that God will withhold wisdom and insight from spiritual leaders who fail to see the pain their lifestyles

and values have caused others. As spiritual leaders throughout the centuries have noted, God's presence is universal, but our ability to intuit God's wisdom is conditioned by our spiritual and ethical practices. Perhaps the nation's prophets have placed a barrier between themselves and God that even God can no longer penetrate. Only a changed vision and heart can awaken them to God's wisdom.

Matthew 23:1–12 also speaks to the issue of spiritual integrity. Once again the religious leaders are the subject of Jesus' critique. Follow their rules, Jesus counsels, not their actions. They jockey for publicity and celebrity status. They look out for their interests rather than caring for the persons whom they are called to lead. Their words eventually become meaningless.

In the same spirit, Paul declares the integrity of his mission to the Thessalonian community. He and his colleagues have embodied a life worthy of the gospel, so that the Thessalonians hear Paul's words as if they are coming straight from God. This is not a matter of spiritual pride on Paul's part but an affirmation that our openness to God allows us to reveal divine wisdom. Limited and imperfect though we are, our lives as well as our words will become vehicles of divine revelation if we listen deeply to God's spirit and live guided by God's vision of wholeness and justice.

When you're lost, stop and be still, and listen.

Spiritual integrity emerges when we pause long enough to see ourselves and others more clearly. According to Buddhist tradition, Gautama Buddha took his first steps toward enlightenment when he ventured forth from the sheltered life of his father's palace and encountered a frail elderly person, a sick person and a corpse. Stripped of his blinders, he realized that his luxury could not immunize him from life's suffering. He abandoned his future as a political leader to seek answers to the realities of pain and suffering.

Empathy is essential to spiritual leadership. When we recognize that everyone is carrying a burden, we take the first steps toward experiencing God's presence in the world. When we transcend our personal filters and become more attentive to the cries of the poor and vulnerable, we become sensitized to God's movements in our lives.

The author is Bruce Epperly, a theologian and spiritual guide whose recent books include Process Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed and Holy Adventure: 41 Days of Audacious Living.

Take & read

New Testament

***Engaging the Word: The New Testament and the Christian Believer*, by Jaime Clark-Soles** (Westminster John Knox, 168 pp., \$20.00 paperback). The word *delightful* rarely attaches itself to an introduction to New Testament study, but *Engaging the Word* is an exception. Clark-Soles surveys a handful of crucial topics (including translation, the study of the Gospels and Paul, the historical Jesus debate and interpretative politics) in a way that is substantive, accessible, and respectful of her audience. This would be an excellent resource for church groups seeking an alternative to the next media frenzy about Jesus and early Christianity.



***Galatians: A Commentary*, by Martinus C. de Boer** (Westminster John Knox, 496 pp., \$50.00). De Boer is well known in scholarly circles for his work on the letters of Paul, work that is sensitive to both historical context and theological concerns. Here he offers a fresh translation and interpretation of Galatians as an “apocalyptic sermon.” The commentary is informed by a wealth of scholarship but is not mired in rehearsing every detail for the reader.

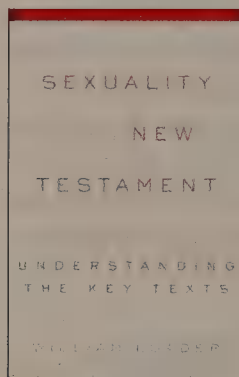
***A Hitchhiker's Guide to Jesus: Reading the Gospels on the Ground*, by Bruce N. Fisk** (Baker Academic, 320 pp., \$22.99 paperback). The contents of this book live up to the advertisement in the title. Fisk introduces the academic study of Jesus and the Gospels through the conceit of a college student's journal while traveling through Israel. The journal entries include such diverse items as accounts of conversations with biblical scholars, sticky notes from primary sources, quotes from Monty Python and a recipe for making a volcano. Along the way “Norm” struggles to reconcile his faith with his findings in a journey that many will recognize as their own.



***John in the Company of Poets: The Gospel in Literary Imagination*, by Thomas Gardner** (Baylor University Press, 236 pp., \$69.95). Reading scripture is too often a hurried affair as we search for some nugget to preach or teach, or even some argument with which to score points in a theological debate. But poets know that genuine reading can never be rushed. The

gift of Gardner's study is both the conversation he constructs between John's Gospel and a diverse group of poets and the way in which that conversation prepares readers to slow down and experience the Gospel again and afresh.

***Shaping the Scriptural Imagination: Truth, Meaning, and the Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, by Donald H. Juel; edited by Shane Berg and Matthew L. Skinner** (Baylor University Press, 228 pp., \$34.95). With the death of Donald Juel in 2003, the church lost one of its most gifted teachers and preachers. In gathering and introducing these fine essays and sermons, Berg and Skinner rightly frontload Juel's convictions about interpretive timidity and defensiveness in the presence of scripture's frightening claims on human life. Those who know Juel's work will want to have this volume; those who don't know Juel's work need to have it.



***Sexuality in the New Testament: Understanding the Key Texts*, by William Loader** (Westminster John Knox, 176 pp., \$20.00 paperback). This deceptively slender volume offers a richly informed discussion of sexuality in the New Testament, including same-sex relations, marriage, adultery, divorce and celibacy. With remarkable clarity and even-handedness, Loader locates the relevant texts both in their own religious and cultural environ-

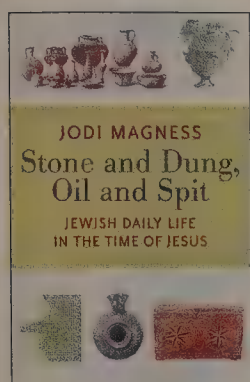
ment and in the context of contemporary exegetical debate.

***Historical Jesus: What Can We Know and How Can We Know It?* by Anthony Le Donne** (Eerdmans, 162 pp., \$12.00 paperback). No, this is not another introduction to the quest for the historical Jesus. Le Donne's provocative, witty, engaging book is best described by the second half of the subtitle. Drawing on postmodern historiography, Le Donne reflects on the complex interrelations between expectation, perception, memory and narration. Although his subject matter is Jesus, readers may find themselves thinking about the construction of family and community histories as well.

***Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World*, by Bruce W. Longenecker** (Eerdmans, 392 pp., \$25.00 paperback). Paul wrote in Galatians 2 that he was eager to remember the poor, but his interpreters have largely assumed that his letters reveal little interest in the economic implications of the gospel. Longenecker mounts an impressive argu-

Selected by Beverly Roberts Gaventa, professor of New Testament literature and exegesis at Princeton Theological Seminary.

ment about Paul's commitment to the poor, an argument enriched by discussion of poverty in the Roman world, Roman charitable initiatives, Jewish-Christian theological resources and the place of the poor in early Christian communities.



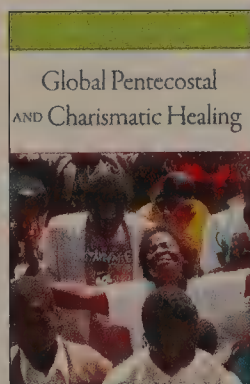
Stone and Dung, Oil and Spit: Jewish Daily Life in the Time of Jesus, by Jodi Magness (Eerdmans, 375 pp., \$25.00 paperback). Meals, money, clothing, animals, buildings, burial and many other quotidian details dot the narratives of the Gospels, and contemporary readers often puzzle over the lives of first-century Jews. Magness draws on both literary and archaeological evidence to construct her informative handbook of daily life in

Palestine in the period 100 B.C.E.–70 C.E. Topics range from locusts and dogs to coins and even toilets and toilet habits.

Paul, the Corinthians and the Birth of Christian Hermeneutics, by Margaret M. Mitchell (Cambridge University Press, 192 pp., \$85.00). Mitchell contends that patristic exegesis of Paul, with its tension between the plain sense and the “unplain” (the veiled or allegorical), has roots in the Corinthian correspondence, in which Paul had to interpret his own earlier statements. She closes with provocative reflections on the relevance of both patristic exegesis and Paul's interpretation of his own words for contemporary debates about hermeneutics.

World Christianity & American religion

Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing, edited by Candy Gunther Brown (Oxford University Press, 424 pp., \$29.95 paperback). Perhaps a half-billion Christians worldwide follow some form of Pentecostal or charismatic faith, and for many, healing in mind and body constitutes a major part of their religious practice. Given the critical importance of the subject, a wide-ranging collection of case studies like this is long overdue. This landmark book—with 17 contributors, who represent the cream of the academic crop—stands out for the authors' sensitive but critical attitude toward some of the most controversial issues in the field, including the prosperity gospel churches.

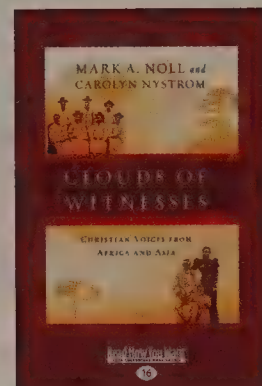


Constructing China's Jerusalem: Christians, Power, and Place in Contemporary Wenzhou, by Nanlai Cao (Stanford University Press, 232 pp., \$21.95 paperback). An anthropologist, Cao shows how the Christian faith works in one population center

of China: Wenzhou, the huge commercial metropolis that has been called China's Jerusalem. Although Christianity appeals to people of various social levels in China, Cao focuses on prosperous elite networks—the alarmingly named Boss Christians—for which this religion is a badge of modernity and progress. Although Cao's book tends toward the academic, it's a beautifully textured study.

Word Made Global: Stories of African Christianity in New York City, by Mark R. Gornik (Eerdmans, 368 pp., \$30.00 paperback). One could debate whether this book should more properly be counted as a contribution to the study of American or global Christianity. Either way, it is an excellent account of thriving transnational denominations, focusing on the Redeemed Christian Church of God, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana and the Church of the Lord (Aladura). Gornik explores the perennial dilemmas of immigrant religions as they encounter their new societies, and the critical role those churches play in helping their members interact with the host culture. He presents an evocative analysis of life in a charismatic church, with plenty of sympathetic characters.

Clouds of Witnesses: Christian Voices from Africa and Asia, by Mark A. Noll and Carolyn Nystrom (InterVarsity Press, 286 pp., \$25.00). You can read all the scholarly analyses of Christian developments around the world, but there is no substitute for thoughtful, readable biographies of individuals—stories that put human faces on significant historic changes. Noll and Nystrom present 17 short biographies of figures who deserve to be counted alongside the greatest names in the Euro-American tradition. This is the sort of book that forces us to rethink how we teach the story of Christianity worldwide.

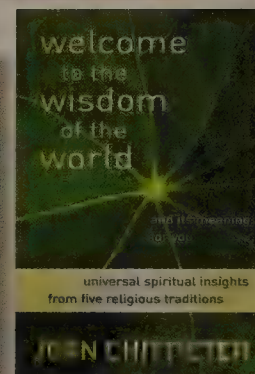
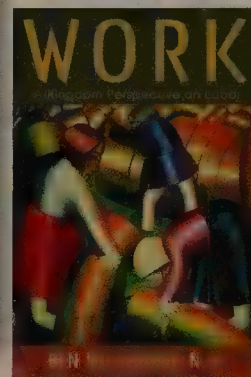
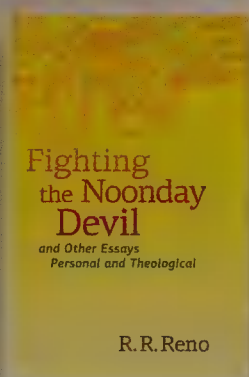
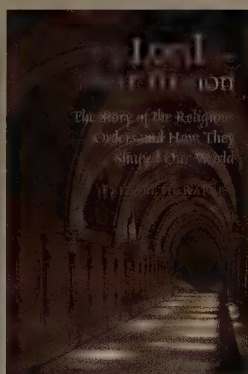
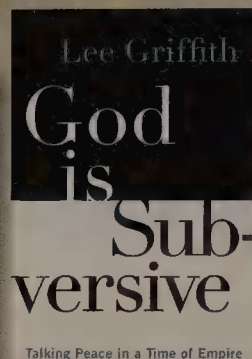
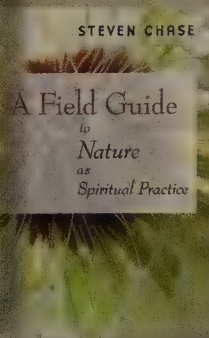


Christianities in Asia, edited by Peter C. Phan (Wiley-Blackwell, 288 pp., \$36.95 paperback). Leading off an impressive new Blackwell series on global Christianity, *Christianities in Asia* is a rich collection of essays on various regions by top-ranked names in the field. Although the societies covered are extremely diverse—Phan includes the Middle East as well as the more obvious regions of East and South Asia—some important common themes emerge. Above all, Christians in Asia live not as dominant majority populations but as small minorities, often coexisting with adherents of other great world faiths, and interactions are not always easy.

American Religion: Contemporary Trends, by Mark Chaves (Princeton University Press, 160 pp., \$22.95). Drawing on the General Social Survey and the National Congregations Study, Chaves offers a concise overview of what has and has not

Selected by Philip Jenkins (*world Christianity*) and Grant A. Wacker (*American religion*), who teach at Penn State and Duke University respectively.

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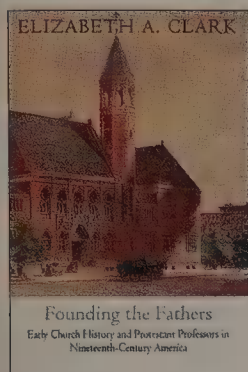
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changed in American religion since 1972. Separate chapters examine trends in diversity, belief, participation, leaders, polarization, congregational life and liberal Protestant decline. Chaves shows that some indicators, such as belief in God, have remained largely unchanged, while others, such as belief in the inerrancy of the Bible, have changed considerably. Elegantly written, this work will serve admirably for students, scholars and Barnes & Noble browsers who want to cut through impressions to the hard data that document the evolution of the religious landscape.



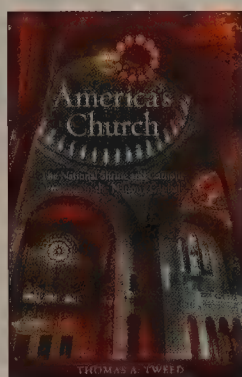
***Founding the Fathers: Early Church History and Protestant Professors in Nineteenth-Century America*, by Elizabeth A. Clark** (University of Pennsylvania Press, 576 pp., \$69.95). This clearly written and often witty work examines the rise of the academic discipline of patristics in four Protestant seminaries: Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

That aim serves as a scaffold for much else, including analysis of transatlantic influences, the confrontation with Catholic thinkers, the enormous impact of German notions of social and cultural evolution and, above all, church historians' determined efforts to establish critical methods for the study of religion. Clark's immersion in the secondary literature and especially in the primary sources—letters, diaries and manuscript class notes—sets the gold standard for serious historical scholarship.

***The Furnace of Affliction: Prisons and Religion in Antebellum America*, by Jennifer Graber** (University of North Carolina Press, 248 pp., \$39.95). Focusing on the New York state prison system in the first half of the 19th century, Graber shows how evangelical ministers sought to transform jails from sites of retaliatory suffering into places of personal redemption—initially with surprising success. Ultimately, however, they failed. Owing to the emerging ideology of church-state separation, growing diversity in their own ranks and, ironically, prisoners' resistance, the reformers found themselves forced out of the discussion. A secular regime that saw punishment as just reward for lawbreaking replaced them. Gracefully crafted, this book offers a perfect example of how to infuse rigorous historical method with moral insight.

***Heaven in the American Imagination*, by Gary Scott Smith** (Oxford University Press, 360 pp., \$29.95). In this sweeping work, Smith describes the dazzling variety of views that the faithful—Puritans, evangelicals, liberals, Catholics, Jews, New Agers and countless others—have held about heaven. Teachings about how to get to heaven and avoid hell figure largely. Smith shows that notions of the afterlife have been firmly rooted in the structures, assumptions, aspirations and antagonisms of each era and each group. The story is rich with irony, as biblical literalism seems to have led in as many directions as biblical antiliteralism. Presented in the winsome prose

of a seasoned journalist, the book exhibits years of careful research.



***America's Church: The National Shrine and Catholic Presence in the Nation's Capital*, by Thomas A. Tweed** (Oxford University Press, 408 pp., \$35.00). *America's Church* is an extraordinary book. Tweed uses the history of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., as a lens for viewing the vast—and vastly complex—landscape of 20th-century American Catholic culture. Themes as diverse as architecture,

childhood, ethnicity, gender, iconography, papacy, philanthropy, soteriology and, of course, the ever-present shadow of the Protestant majority tumble from the pages in rich profusion. This cornucopia of topics easily could have submerged the narrative, but it does not. Tweed keeps his eye firmly fixed on the story of the National Shrine, which is as interesting as it is important.

Practical theology



***A Play-Full Life: Slowing Down and Seeking Peace*, by Jaco J. Hamman** (Pilgrim, 224 pp., \$22.00 paperback). In an era and society in which fear, worry and anxiety are ever-present and constantly amplified, Hamman offers a play-full life as both an alternative and a form of faithful resistance. For Hamman, play is less a specific activity than a way of being and an attitude toward life. Like deep sleep (also at risk for many these days), “play helps us manage our destructiveness and rejuvenates the mind.”

***A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good*, by Miroslav Volf** (Brazos, 192 pp., \$21.99). At once erudite and accessible, Volf explores the place and role of religion, Christianity in particular, in public life. He offers an alternative to two common options: religious totalitarianism on one hand and relegation of faith to the private or familial on the other. He wrestles with many of the most vexing contemporary questions, such as the alleged link between faith and violence.

***Aging Together: Dementia, Friendship, and Flourishing Communities*, by Susan H. McFadden and John T. McFadden** (Johns Hopkins University Press, 256 pp., \$55.00). A psycholo-

Selected by Anthony B. Robinson, president of Congregational Leadership Northwest and author, most recently, of Stewardship for Vital Congregations (Pilgrim).

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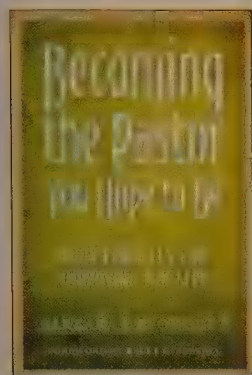
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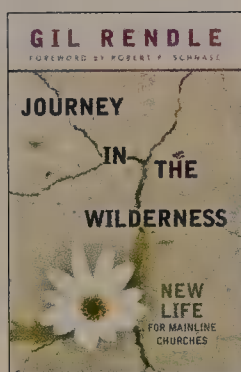
gist-gerontologist and a pastor-theologian join voices and perspectives to address the rising incidence of dementia and the challenge it presents to individuals, families, the church and society. This book offers an alternative to the tendency to either seek medical miracles or isolate sufferers and withdraw from them. It is an alternative rooted in Christian faith, the “subversive practice” of friendship and the life of congregations that imagine “aging together.”



***Becoming the Pastor You Hope to Be: Four Practices for Improving Ministry*, by Barbara J. Blodgett** (Alban Institute, 181 pp., \$17.00 paperback). Arguing that capable and wise pastors are not born but made, Blodgett carefully explores four practices that help pastors grow and flourish: soliciting feedback, mentoring, peer-group learning and leadership in public ministry. This very helpful book is useful not only for clergy and clergy

groups but also for personnel and pastoral relations committees that want to deepen their conversations and know how to better encourage and strengthen the pastors with whom they work.

***Journey in the Wilderness: New Life for Mainline Churches*, by Gilbert R. Rendle** (Abingdon, 176 pp., \$16.00 paperback). A longtime Alban Institute consultant, Rendle surveys what mainline congregations have faced, tried and learned during the challenging recent decades. Affirming that mainline congregations and leaders have learned quite a lot, he consolidates key insights and looks over the Jordan to a new land on the horizon.



***Making Sense of Sex: Responsible Decision Making for Young Singles*, by Michael F. Duffy** (Westminster John Knox, 176 pp., \$20.00 paperback). Although his book is primarily addressed to young adults, such as the college students he teaches, Duffy’s approach to sex and decision making should be helpful to people of many ages and in various types of relationships. He avoids telling his readers what to think or do but suggests a way to think and factors to think about in making choices about sex. Honest, calm and straightforward.

***Nurturing Spiritual Depth in Christian Worship: Ten Practices*, by Janice Jean Springer** (Resource Publications, 160 pp., \$21.95 paperback). This is a particularly helpful book for worship leaders and planners. Springer takes the much-

needed approach of considering what happens with energy in worship. With chapters like “Move People Out of Their Heads,” “Make Every Part Match” and “Use Fewer Words,” Springer helps worship planners to create experiences of spiritual depth that have integrity.



***Renovation of the Church: What Happens When a Seeker Church Discovers Spiritual Formation*, by Kent Carlson and Mike Lueken** (InterVarsity Press, 185 pp., \$15.00 paperback). This is the story of two pastors and a church that drank deeply at the well of the megachurch seeker model but came to suspect that such churches were in the business more of religious consumerism than of making disciples. The book provides a view into the evangelical world and culture and some of its struggles. The lessons are transferable to mainline churches facing similar issues.

***Who Is My Enemy? Questions American Christians Must Face about Islam—and Themselves*, by Lee C. Camp** (Brazos, 192 pp., \$17.99 paperback). Camp examines Islam and Christianity and argues that Christians have much to learn about both faiths, including perspectives on war, peace, violence and other religions. Noting that contemporary views of Islam often tend toward one of two extremes—that all Muslims are warmongers or that all religions are the same and are peaceable—Camp goes deeper, asking Christians to learn not only about Islam but about themselves. Timely and provocative.

***Worship Matters: A Study for Congregations*, by Jane Rogers Vann** (Westminster John Knox, 152 pp., \$20.00 paperback). Vann notes that congregations don’t talk often or deeply about worship and argues that they need to. In this guide for study, conversation and strengthening worship, she emphasizes the varied languages, or elements, of worship that come together in the central event of congregational life.

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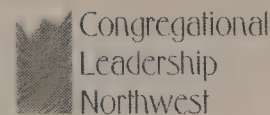
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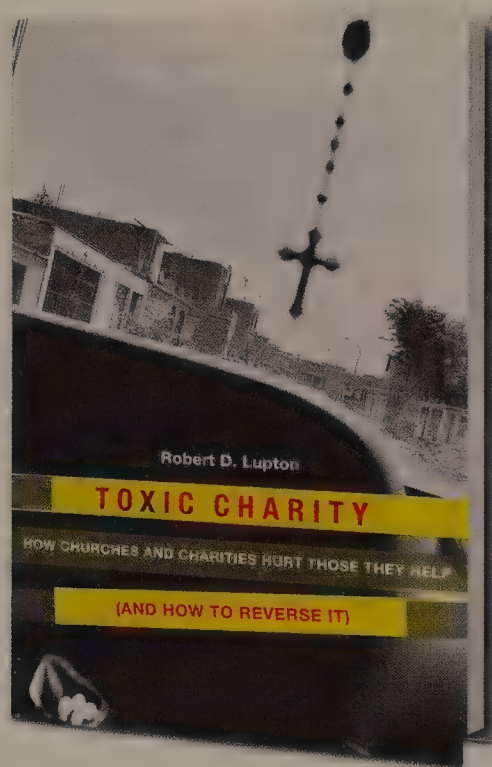
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FALL BOOKS

Nonfiction

Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating

By Norman Wirzba
Cambridge University Press,
264 pp., \$24.99 paperback

Pastors have long known that there is more going on with food and eating than the mere filling of the stomach. We know that the Eucharist is more than bread, wine and people gathering around the Lord's table. If we've been pastors for very long, we also know that church potlucks are more than chicken and potato salad, and we know that something more goes on when a congregation feeds the homeless. Some of us are even learning that there's more happening with gardening than just raising corn. We know there's more, even though sometimes we might be hard-pressed to explain what the more is. Norman Wirzba's *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating* helps us with the more better than anything else I've read.

Wirzba is research professor of theology, economy and rural life at Duke Divinity School and the author of *The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age* and *Living the Sabbath: Discovering the Rhythms of Rest and Delight*, the latter a lively and delightful read for congregations and small groups. He also serves as the general editor for the University Press of Kentucky's very fine Culture of the Land series, and he edited the first volume in that series, *The Essential Agrarian Reader: The Future of Culture, Community, and the Land*. Of the books he's edited, the best known is the Wendell Berry collection *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, for which Wirzba's introduction is one of the best short introductions to Berry in print. Wirzba has estab-



lished himself as a leading theologian in helping the church think about the connections between agrarianism, faithful discipleship and caring for God's creation. He has done so by combining insight, attentiveness and solid scholarly work with good, clean prose. It's not incidental that he's also a very fine gardener.

In *Food and Faith*, Wirzba asks with the first sentence, "Why did God create a world in which every living creature must eat?" By the second page he gives the short answer: "Eating joins people to each other, to other creatures and to the world, and to God through forms of 'natural communion' too complex to fathom." He wants us to know that we don't understand food until we realize that its origin and end is God and that every mundane act of eating is a daily invitation to commune with God and God's creation.

It's all about communion, community and membership, which are rooted in the triune God, within whom there is "no subordination or hierarchy. Rather, the Three share life with each other in complete mutuality; . . . they always abide in each other." Wirzba explains the ancient doctrine of *perichoresis* as a kind of "mutual abiding" wherein the One is "making room in itself for the other." From the trinitarian God to the Eucharist, where we are able to participate in this trinitarian life, to gardening, where we imitate God by cultivating food while we are being cultivated in order to produce affections and forms of attention that make us "capable of communion," Wirzba sees food as one of the primary ways we enter into complex membership and communion with God, with each other and with all of creation.

But we live in exile, which Wirzba defines as "the refusal to welcome and accept responsibility for the membership of creation of which we are a part"; exile is alienation and isolation from communion. Exilic eating is when we eat poorly, in a way

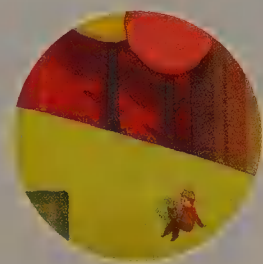
Reviewed by Kyle Childress, pastor of Austin Heights Baptist Church in Nacogdoches, Texas.

that is fragmented from a healthy food chain, which results in our various eating disorders, including everything from obesity to industrial agriculture, destruction of the environment and degradation of our food. Exilic eating is the opposite of eating eucharistically.

Wirzba discusses death, sacrifice and eating, briefly touching on different perspectives of vegetarianism and offering a wonderful reflection on feasting and fasting before bringing the reader back to the Eucharist, which provides the place of

orientation on food and eating. In the final stretch he discusses gratitude and celebration, and he explains why saying grace at the table is important theologically and politically.

The concluding chapter, "Eating in Heaven? Consummating Communion," is worth the price of the book. In spite of Jesus' resurrection meals and food-related parables, such as that of the great banquet, I had not given much thought to whether there will be eating in heaven. Wirzba has thought about it, and he demonstrates that ancient thinkers like



ESSENTIAL BOOKS ON Job

***On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, by Gustavo Gutiérrez.** Gutiérrez traces the theme of social justice in the book of Job, arguing that Job's suffering leads him to an increasing awareness of injustices afflicted on the poor. Gutiérrez also powerfully underscores the importance of contemplative appreciation for the sheer "gratuitousness" of life, to which he sees God pointing in the whirlwind speeches. Even if Gutiérrez is wrong about Job initially sharing the "retribution theology" of his friends, this book is a spiritual classic.

***At the Scent of Water: The Ground of Hope in the Book of Job*, by J. Gerald Janzen.** A mature scholar reads the book as part of a larger interaction in the Bible between understanding God as a king figure who is associated with blessings of land and offspring (in the Abraham stories and elsewhere) and understanding God as a king who enforces political and social justice (in the Moses stories and elsewhere). Job's friends use the royal metaphor to trace Job's suffering to a presumed guilt, while Job and God, according to Janzen, appeal to a clan theology that does not guarantee freedom from unjust suffering but does refute the friends' accusations and persuade Job that life is worth living.

***Answer to Job*, by Carl G. Jung.** At the end of his career, in one of his most controversial books, Jung asks how varied God images reflect and guide the soul's quest for wholeness. Whether or not you agree with Jung's archetypal interpretation, his unsparing questions about the characterization of God in Job and other biblical books (especially Revelation) need to be faced, along with his proposal that violence is most likely to erupt precisely when we insist that we are—or our God is—simply good rather than complexly whole.

***The Book of Job*, by Stephen Mitchell.** This book offers a dynamic poetic rendering (with technical notes at the end) of most of the book of Job (chapters 28 and 32–37 are omitted) by a translator who specializes in spiritual classics. Be sure to get an edition that includes Mitchell's perceptive introductory essay on Job's tone and literary dynamics. Mitchell translates Job 42:6, "Therefore I will be quiet, comforted that I am dust."

***The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations*, by Carol A. Newsom.** Newsom ponders the presence of multiple genres in Job, suggesting that they create a dialogue between different "moral imaginations." She offers the important suggestion that the contest between these component viewpoints remains unresolved, although our own understanding is enriched by their encounter.

***J. B.: A Play in Verse*, by Archibald MacLeish.** This play, of roughly the same vintage as Jung's *Answer to Job*, retells Job's story in a 20th-century context. The dialogue between the circus hands who play God and Satan raises trenchant questions about theology and faith, while the conclusion sounds a subdued but powerful note of hope in human love.

Selected by Marti J. Steussy, who teaches biblical interpretation at Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, and edited Chalice Introduction to the Old Testament (Chalice Press).

Tertullian and Augustine did as well. Wirzba says that if eating is about hospitality and intimacy (and not just about gobbling down something to assuage the latest hunger) and heaven is a place where eternal life is not so much about length as about the depth and quality of relationship, where relationship and membership are sites of healing nurture, then the possibility of eating in heaven begins to make sense. This is why when we eat well, in communion, we taste a little bit of heaven here on earth.

This book is full of ideas and themes that almost leap off the page into the pulpit and pastoral ministry. For example, Wirzba uses the wonderful phrase “being capable of communion” in several places. He introduces this phrase early in the book when he explains:

To transform eating into a spiritual exercise is to cultivate the practical conditions and habits—attention, conversation, reflection, gratitude, honest accounting . . . for us to see with depth and appreciate the gifted and graced character of the world. . . . We must be capable of communion, capable of entering into and seeing the value of a community that is not simply a collectivity.

When I read that, I immediately started thinking about how much of my pastoral work is helping people become capable of communion. They come in the door well schooled in a kind

Every mundane act of eating
is an invitation to commune
with God and with God's
creation.

of Tea Party spirituality that understands everyone as autonomous, and God and church as existing for the individual's spiritual consumption. Many want a truer communion in Christ but have no idea what it looks like, how to participate in it and how to sustain it. Even staying married creates a challenge. A great deal of my job involves preparing the ground, planting the seeds, caring and cultivating so people can eventually grow into membership and communion.

This tells us why Wirzba's work is so important to the church and why many pastors are reading agrarians like Berry, whose 1977 book *The Unsettling of America* is one of the starting points of what is loosely called the new agrarianism (in contrast to the old agrarianism of the 1930s). Wirzba writes to counter the destruction of land and farms and communities by industrial agriculture. He and other environmental writers, like Michael Pollan, have joined Berry, plant geneticist Wes Jackson and farmer Gene Logsdon to help us understand that agrarianism is a “compelling and coherent alternative to the modern industrial/technological/economic paradigm.” Wirzba has said that agrarianism is not “a throwback to a never-realized pastoral arcadia” but “the sustained attempt to live faithfully and

responsibly in a world of limits and possibilities.” Or, as I've heard him say, “it's about learning to live as creatures.”

Pastors see congregations being co-opted by this same industrial/technological/economic way of thinking, which turns churches into spiritual superstores, confuses evangelism with marketing, judges success by the profit margins of the “three Bs”—bodies, buildings and budgets—and sees speed and spectacle as the standards of worship. Pastors are looking for skills and insights to help us be faithful to Christ in our particular place, with our particular people, instead of becoming a franchise of the newest and biggest successful store/church. From Wirzba and Berry we can learn that local food, farmers' markets and local economies are places of ministry, and they help us recover our vocation to care for God's good creation. They also help us realize that agrarian lessons make good pastoral sense.

When I was a seminarian, a veteran pastor told me that you can tell a lot about a church by how much people linger with each other after worship. If church members hang around and talk until you have to turn out the lights and push them out the door, and then talk more outside, it's a sign of a good church. But if church is rushed and as soon as the Amen is sounded, they head out the door to their cars, with everyone going their separate ways, that's not a good sign.

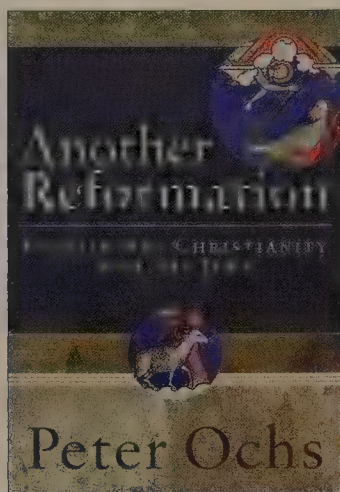
Both agrarianism and the slow-food movement say that we will care about food (and all that goes with it, like Earth, the workers, farming and cooking) when we take time to linger, pay attention, listen and learn about how food is grown, produced, prepared and consumed. There is more going on here than pastors wanting to be farmers or gardeners. As Wirzba puts it, when we cherish God's gifts and savor and linger with God and with each other, our eating and our life together as the people of God can “rightly be understood as a ‘rehearsal of heaven on earth.’”

When I was growing up in a small town in West Texas, every Sunday afternoon after church we went to my grandparents' house for dinner along with dozens of relatives and neighbors. Later, in the cool of the day, when everyone had gone home, I walked with my grandfather around the garden and among his peach trees. If he spotted a particularly good-looking ripe peach out of reach, it was my job to climb the tree and bring it down, and then we'd go over to the porch, where he sat in his favorite chair, propping his feet on the trunk of the nearby pecan tree (which leans to this day from 50 years of propped feet). Of course, I wanted to bite into the peach immediately, but he'd say, “There are some things worth waiting for.” He'd pull out his old Case pocketknife and slowly peel that peach so that the peel was in one continuous swirl, and then he'd walk over and throw the peel to the chickens while I grew even more impatient. Finally, he'd cut a slice of that peach and hand it to me, then cut a slice for himself, and with the first savoring bite he'd say, “Boy, if that doesn't make you believe in heaven, nothing will.” Between the garden, my grandmother's cooking, people everywhere, the walk and conversation and sharing of the peach with my grandfather, I believed every word of what he said.

According to the insights of Wirzba's book, my grandfather was a pretty good theologian.

Another Reformation: Postliberal Christianity and the Jews

By Peter Ochs
Baker, 304 pp., \$27.99 paperback



The interface of Jewish and Christian theology has always been vexing. Partly this is because of the intrinsically incommensurate realities of the two faiths. And partly it has been because of Christian interpreters' uncritical practice of supersessionism, which has been combined with political power that is used in controlling and abusive ways. Happily, we are at the threshold of a new way of communicating at that interface.

Many interpreters have contributed to this emerging possibility. In Old Testament studies, the most important summoning work has been Jon Levenson's 1987 article "Why Jews Are Not Interested in Biblical Theology," which made unmistakably clear the supersessionist assumptions of even the most sophisticated interpreters.

More broadly, no one has contributed more to this fresh possibility than Peter Ochs. With his largeness of spirit, his

deep theological sensibility and his practical passion for fresh work with Christians, he has taken on important initiatives that have made room for new communication and understanding. His initiatives honor the distinctions and differences between the two traditions, and through face-to-face engagement with texts, which he calls Scriptural Reasoning, he has encouraged participants to move beyond stereotypes to deal with what matters most about differences and about commonalities. He has judged, surely correctly, that Judaism and Christianity are proper conversation partners, and that neither tradition can faithfully take Enlightenment rationality as its mode of witness or as its proper conversation partner.

In *Another Reformation* Ochs presents a survey of newer Christian interpreters whom he categorizes as postliberal. They move in new directions, start with different assumptions and have different intentions in mind.

It is not easy to define what *postliberal* means. The liberalism to which it is post is the popular, uncritical assumption that theological claims must be submitted to modern Enlightenment reason, a preference that continues to be powerful among self-styled progressives. That mode of rationality has been the defining epistemological commitment of historical-critical scripture study, a point well made by Levenson.

Ochs shows that such liberal theology is given to dyadic or binary reasoning, so that exclusive contrasts are the order of the day—surely among them the contrast between Judaism

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and Christianity, with an unstated footnote to Marcion. The postliberals have moved beyond that binary way of discerning the claims of faith. Ochs shows that antiliberals, by which he means conservatives who interpret scripture as a set of propositions (as George Lindbeck observes), have played the same binary game, and he exposes the way in which both liberals and antiliberals are pressed by such binary thinking to superses-

Postliberalism escapes the trap of binary reasoning.

sionism—because they set the claims of the Christian gospel logically and exclusively over against the claims of Judaism.

The substance of Ochs's book is his review, in two clusters, of the most important interpreters who do postliberal work. On the U.S. scene the lead characters are Lindbeck, with his defining book *The Nature of Doctrine*; Stanley Hauerwas, with his widely published and widely articulated rejection of modernism; and Robert Jenson, whose "reparative work" on the disunity of the church is given detailed consideration here. These three theologians have moved in new directions that amount to nothing less than a reformation of the categories through which faith is presented and understood. To these Ochs adds John Howard Yoder, for whom he has great appreciation but whom he finally judges

not to be postliberal. The reason is that Yoder continues to engage in binary thinking, particularly with his assertion that exilic Judaism is the real thing, in contrast to Messianic Judaism. One can see the decisiveness of this issue for Ochs, for such a judgment breaks the triad of "torah, land and people" and refuses "the dialectical relation between exile and landedness" that is representative of "classical Jewish life and belief."

His second cluster of scholars consists of the two English Anglican theologians Daniel Hardy and David Ford, for whom postliberalism is much more consciously ecclesial but moves in the same direction beyond binary thinking. To these Ochs adds John Milbank, except that Milbank has a yen for the universal and thus is not a postliberal in Ochs's view.

The upshot of Ochs's careful, erudite, detailed argument is that postliberal theology escapes the traps of both liberal and antiliberal reason and so is not drawn to supersessionism. Indeed, postliberal theology is perforce nonsupersessionist, and because of this move beyond binary reasoning and an ache for the universal, "in the company of these partnerships, Jews need not consider themselves alone." That happy judgment, shot through with pathos, measures the way in which supersessionism has excluded Jews from the table of faith and the companionship that properly belongs to biblical possibility.

Reviewed by Walter Brueggemann, whose most recent book is Disruptive Grace: Reflections on God, Scripture, and the Church (Fortress).

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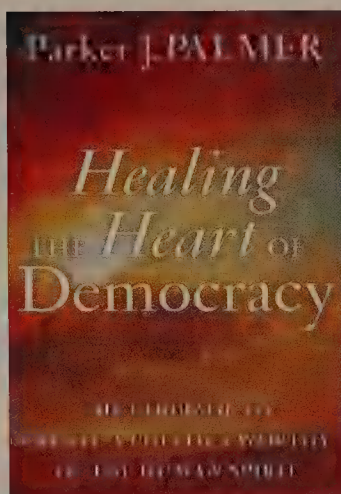
Postliberal theology, Ochs makes clear, is an immensely important force in contemporary thought. It is characterized by a vagueness that does not need to sort things out into contradictions and contrasts that exclude and by a satisfaction with the particular that can be trusted. Postliberals have no need to make clear, universal claims for truth that are inevitably triumphalist and exclusionary. With this accent on the particular, it follows that another particular, Judaism for Christians and Christianity for Jews, can be honored and taken seriously, as Ochs himself does in this venturesome work.

Beyond its main thesis, this book is an invitation to engage further the demanding work of the theologians cited here. A companion book might now be written on “postliberal Judaism and the Christians.”

Now that postliberal Christian theology has found a way beyond Christian triumphalism and the exclusionary claims of Christ, I wonder how this perspective might relate to a postliberal Jewish understanding of the Torah or of the land (to which Ochs gestures by referring to the dialectic of exilic and Messianic Judaism). I cite Torah and land as the two apparent nonnegotiables of Judaism in a manner not unlike the way Christ is the Christian nonnegotiable. I wonder whether a postliberal Jewish sense of Torah might move in the direction of Paul’s complex argument about Jews and gentiles before the Torah. Such a study is worth waiting for.

In any case, Ochs has performed a formidable interpretive task that awaits follow-up in local settings. The *post* of *postliberal* is the awareness that faith need be neither “relativist nor triumphalist” but can trust the divine Word, who “convinces, guides, and redeems through intimate relation rather than through cognitive affirmation-or-denial.” Ochs, in his practice and in his exposition, exhibits a way of relating and thinking and believing that makes wholeness and healing possible. It is no wonder that this postliberal enterprise constitutes “another reformation” that will, as in that time past, give a transformative shock to the fashions of certitude and control that continue to prevail among us.

**Healing the Heart
of Democracy:
The Courage to Create
a Politics Worthy of
the Human Spirit**
By Parker J. Palmer
Jossey-Bass, 256 pp., \$24.95



The title of Parker Palmer's book suggests that when he uses the words *democracy* and *politics* he is concerned with something much more than everyday politics in a society that is formally democratic. The words *healing* and *human spirit* suggest that we will be getting a meditation on the deep meaning of democracy and politics, not a study of the nuts and bolts of political practice.

Palmer's project stands in a tradition that goes back at least as far as Plato, who thought that the individual soul and the soul of society were mutually related, each strengthening or undermining the other. Palmer does not refer to Plato, but he does refer throughout the book to two men who carried out Plato's tradition: Alexis de Tocqueville and Abraham Lincoln. Both were sensitive to the kind of person who makes democracy possible, the kind of person that democracy produces and the many problems that this relation gives rise to.

Heart, as Palmer uses it, is "a word that reaches far beyond our feelings." It includes the mind but "goes deeper than the mind alone can take us." His is a biblical use of the word, closely related to the idea of conscience, though in linking the emotional with the intellectual and both with the ethical, he reaches for a meaning that is deeper and more inclusive than that of any other English word. From the beginning, Palmer's concern with the term *heart* leads us into another idea that pervades the book: brokenheartedness. Here too the link between person and society is central.

Palmer explains that he has suffered several bouts of extreme depression, and he points out that much in our history, particularly our nearly continual wars, leads to a kind of public brokenheartedness. In discussing how the individual heart and the heart of democracy work together, he uses Tocqueville's phrase *habits of the heart*, the practices of daily life that enable individuals to work effectively in a democratic society or that prevent them from doing so.

The book has a formal structure that seems to reflect more conventional treatments of democracy, dealing as it does with the nature of our formal democracy, the kind of civil society that gives life to those democratic formalities, the voluntary associations that mobilize social and political participation, the classrooms and congregations that are engaged in the formation of democratic persons, and the deep cultural resources from which all these activities draw. Yet even as Palmer touches base with almost every aspect of democratic life, his seemingly lineal structure constantly

returns to Tocqueville and Lincoln and to terms such as *heart*, the *brokenhearted* and most often *habits of the heart* (though he never mentions a well-known book with that title). This ever deeper circling back on these key figures and terms gives the book an almost poetic quality that is appropriate and moving, making it more a spiritual meditation than a political handbook.

Palmer's life is a close reflection of what he teaches. He is a committed Quaker who relates a concern for inner spiritual development to activism in support of ethical causes. He has spoken at many universities and colleges but has not pursued an academic career. He has been connected with a variety of groups, some of them deeply communal, and has moved freely among these groups, teaching and encouraging along the way. His books, such as *The Courage to Teach* and *A Hidden Wholeness*, have been well received and his thoughtful lectures widely attended. He has been constantly on the move intellectually and spiritually, a kind of Socratic gadfly in American life. With all this in mind, what is he trying to say to us in this latest book?

He is saying something that political activists badly need to hear: make sure that your own life embodies the things you are fighting for. The struggle is inner as well as outer. To the more naturally contemplative he says: think about how what you have found within relates to the society around you

Political activists should
make sure that their own
lives embody the things
they are fighting for.

and how you could make your inner world better in small ways or large. He is not preaching the prosperity gospel or even the ordinary American gospel of happiness. With Freud, he says that it will be a victory to achieve even ordinary unhappiness, because our lives are always on the edge of brokenheartedness and despair, things Americans are too prone to deny.

I think Palmer would say that though optimism is often illusory, hope can carry us beyond the inevitable setbacks so we can find joy in working for a better world. What his book does best is to help us as deeply troubled but constantly changing individuals to find places in a deeply troubled and constantly moving society where we can encounter others committed to the search for the common good and join them in a project that we can never complete but that we can sometimes move for the better.

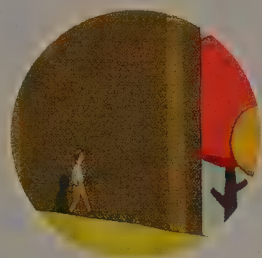
Perhaps at the core of Palmer's message is the way he uses the image of brokenheartedness to show two alternatives: our

Reviewed by Robert N. Bellah, whose latest book is Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age (Harvard University Press).

heart can break in pieces, sometimes with explosive violence and inevitably with chaotic results, or our heart can break open, leading us to renewal and reconciliation. He beautifully uses Lincoln, who himself suffered throughout his life from bouts of severe depression. According to Palmer, Lincoln's heart broke open, and this led to life-giving possibilities, so magnificently expressed in his seminal writings, such as the Gettysburg Address and his Second Inaugural. Palmer's politics is not the politics of despair or the politics of inevitable

progress, but the politics of people trying to live better lives as they attempt to work together for a better society—knowing that they will have many setbacks and only partial successes, but still finding the struggle of ordinary life for ordinary goods to be fulfilling in itself.

Palmer is at his best in his treatment of individual spiritual development and the circles of trust that can extend that development into group life. Early on he uses the example of the 18th-century Quaker John Woolman, who opened his heart,



ESSENTIAL BOOKS ON atonement

***Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today*, edited by Marit Trelstad.** This is the best one-stop survey of contemporary critiques and concerns related to the cross. The book is not an anthology of excerpts but a collection of essays, many written specifically for this volume. The collection is especially illustrative of the range of feminist thinking on the subject. If none of these 19 voices raises your pulse, this theological topic is probably not for you.

***Sacrifice Unveiled: The True Meaning of Christian Sacrifice*, by Robert J. Daly.** An accessible distillation of a lifetime of work by a leading scholar on Christian sacrifice, *Sacrifice Unveiled* weaves autobiography and research. It reads like a three-part detective story as Daly unveils his unexpected discoveries of the deeper meaning of the idea of sacrifice in its historical, liturgical and ethical contexts. Great erudition stands behind this tour of the horizon, from Jewish origins through New Testament teachings, from early liturgical expressions to the current canon of the Roman Catholic mass, from church history to contemporary social issues.

***The Nonviolent Atonement*, by J. Denny Weaver.** A Mennonite theologian, Weaver is among those who have thought earliest and deepest about recasting our understanding of the cross. Mennonites are clear in their commitment to nonviolence but generally uninterested in systematic theology. The reverse may be said of many major theological voices. In bringing his Mennonite perspective to a rigorous theological argument, Weaver bridges that gap.

***Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire*, by Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker.** In their earlier work, *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering and the Search for What Saves Us*, Brock and Parker set out problems with atonement theology in searingly experiential and autobiographical terms. This book takes its cue from the fact that crucifixion images are absent from the first four centuries of Christian history (although Christ's death figures centrally in the writing and liturgy of the same period). The authors lay out a sweeping historical claim about atonement thinking as a theological wrong turn and issue a passionate plea for a return to the path they believe was forsaken.

***Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition*, by Hans Boersma.** Those who critique the critics of atonement theology and reject efforts to downplay the cross often suggest that these revisionist approaches are not serious about the depth of sin and understate the cost of reconciliation. Boersma's book, crisply Reformed in tenor, may be the most thoughtful and nuanced exploration of these concerns. He carefully probes how far glib dismissals of notions of wrath or expiation might go in preventing us from appreciating what God is against or what is incompatible with God's love.

Selected by S. Mark Heim, who teaches theology at Andover Newton Theological School, Newton Centre, Massachusetts, and is the author of Saved from Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross (Eerdmans).

out of compassion for slaves, and preached emancipation to his fellow Quakers. Woolman was so successful in a life filled with preaching journeys up and down the eastern seaboard that he finally, in 1783, persuaded the Society of Friends to petition Congress to free the slaves. Palmer takes pride in noting that Woolman's efforts brought the Quakers to a point not reached by the United States until 80 years later.

What he leaves out is any discussion of what had to happen in those 80 years before Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. He briefly refers to large issues of history, culture and social change, but they are never the focus of his attention. This leads him perilously close to the idea that good causes win by changing one heart at a time, a common belief in this country. Changing hearts one at a time is always important, but one book, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, changed the hearts of millions of white Americans who were unsympathetic to slavery but not yet seriously engaged

in ending it. That book moved public opinion strongly in the direction of abolitionism and Lincoln's Republican Party. Of course, one book didn't do it alone, but some historians believe that it was the match that lit the fire of the abolitionist cause.

My point is that historical, cultural and social forces that do not work primarily at the level of individuals and small groups are also essential to an understanding of democracy, including the heart of democracy. Palmer does a lot for us, and it may be unfair to blame him for not doing everything. But it is not unfair to point out that concentrating on individuals and face-to-face groups while largely ignoring the larger historical currents of culture and society can encourage the kind of individualistic approach to social problems that is all too evident in American society—the kind of approach that can actually inhibit change rather than move us in a better direction.



ESSENTIAL BOOKS ON children's ministry

***Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey*, by Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May.** After listening for more than a decade to children and childhood experiences, the authors introduce readers to a variety of children's ideas about God and faith. They then interpret their research findings via the lens of evangelical theology and human development theories and suggest strategies for congregational life and ministries.

***Enduring Connections: Creating a Preschool and Children's Ministry*, by Janice Haywood.** The author begins by debunking several myths about children's ministries and then describes how a congregation can effectively develop programs for preschool and grade-school children. Chapters are organized topically so the reader can select the information most pertinent at a given time. Appendices provide sample surveys, job descriptions and age-graded learning goals.

***Home Grown: Handbook for Christian Parenting*, by Karen DeBoer.** Children's ministries are most effective when congregations partner with parents in nurturing childhood faith. DeBoer organizes this book as a series of responses to 111 questions that parents might ask church leaders and draws on interviews with several evangelical and mainstream Protestant scholars to inform her answers.

***Helping Our Children Grow in Faith*, by Robert J. Keeley.** Keeley presents six principles for children's ministries, including an emphasis on God's mystery and a distinction between faith and moral development. The author also provides concrete suggestions for involving children in all aspects of congregational life, including weekly worship.

***The Child in the Bible*, edited by Marcia J. Bunge, Terence E. Fretheim and Beverly Roberts Gaventa.** This is an accessible introduction to biblical teaching on children and childhood that can help church leaders move beyond Sunday school recollections of Bible stories. Pastors may want to use this text as a resource when preaching or teaching, particularly in addressing concepts such as childlike faith, discipline and family relationships.

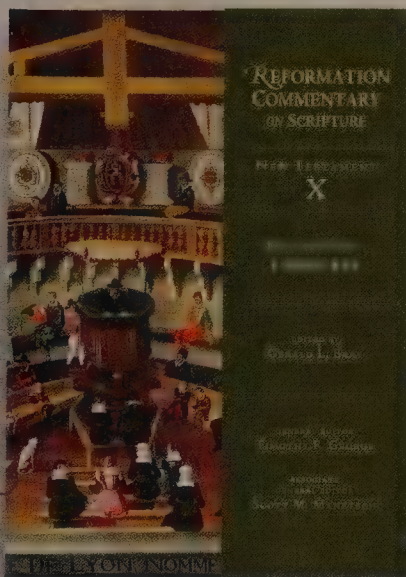
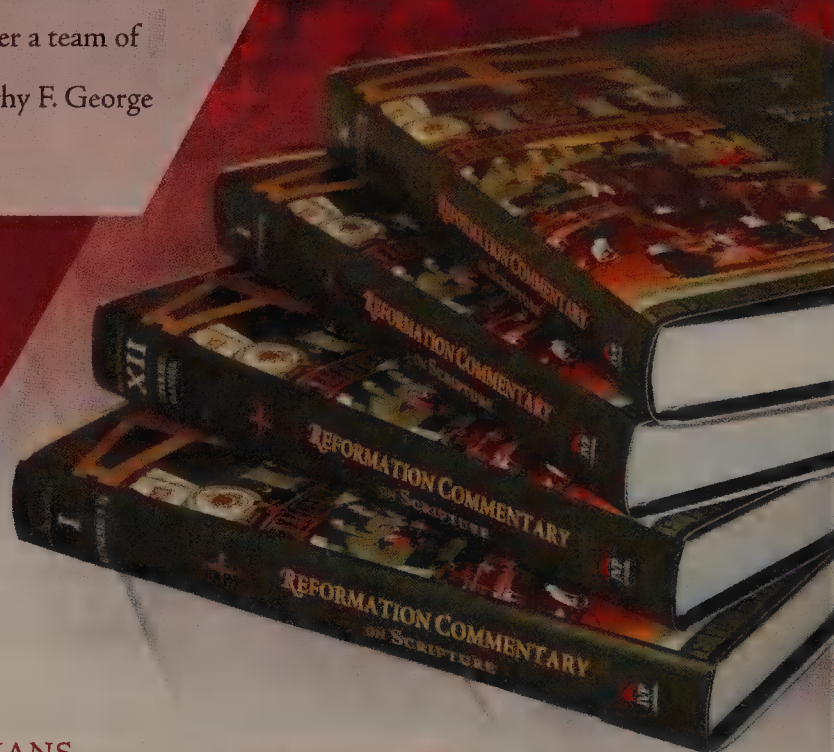
Selected by Karen-Marie Yust, who teaches Christian education at Union Presbyterian Seminary, Richmond, Virginia, and is author of Real Kids, Real Faith (Jossey-Bass).

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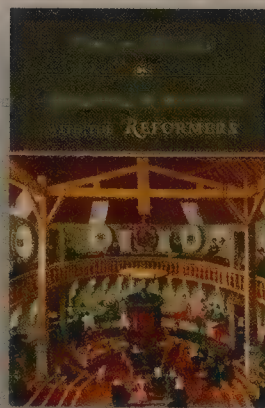
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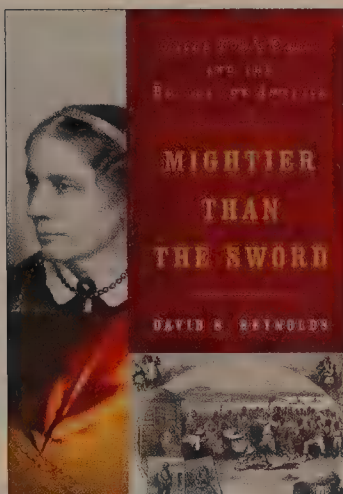
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Mightier Than the Sword: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the Battle for America

By David S. Reynolds
Norton, 351 pp., \$27.95



Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* stands alongside Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*, Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* and Frederick Douglass's *Narrative* as an American classic. Any liberally educated person needs to know something about Eliza, Uncle Tom, Eva and the notorious Simon Legree. Stowe's novel filled the American imagination with the cruelty and injustice of slavery, and it may even have motivated some northerners to take up arms. Upon meeting Stowe for the first time in 1862, Abraham Lincoln allegedly greeted the most famous woman in America by asking, "Is this the little woman who made this great war?" With the 150th anniversary of the Civil War upon us, now would be a good time to dust off your paperback copy of the novel and either read it again or lend it to someone who has yet to enjoy it.

If you have read *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, then you should also read David Reynolds's *Mightier Than the Sword*. A professor of English and American studies at the City University of New York Graduate Center and the author of books on John Brown, Walt Whitman and America in the Age of Jackson, Reynolds has established himself as one of the great chroniclers of 19th-century American culture. His book is best described as a biography of Stowe's famous novel. Those who have not read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* will find Reynolds's book informative and interesting, but those who have spent some time with Stowe's masterpiece will find his interpretation of the novel and its place in American culture to be an intellectual feast.

Reynolds situates Stowe and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the evangelical culture of the early 19th-century United States. Stowe was raised in the most prominent religious family in the country. Her father, Lyman Beecher, was a nationally known Congregational minister and social reformer. Her brother Henry Ward Beecher followed in his father's footsteps and became, to use the title of Debby Applegate's wonderful biography, the most famous man in America. Her sister Catharine became an educator and advocate for women's rights. Although the Beecher family's theological roots were deeply embedded in 17th-century New England Puritanism, Lyman's children rejected their childhood Calvinism. Stowe's brand of evangelicalism was more hopeful than harsh, more democratic than hierarchical and more egalitarian than authoritative. She was a follower of revivalist Charles Finney, embraced the Wesleyan doctrine of perfectionism and even claimed that she was inspired to write *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by a vision from God. In the same way that the male members of her family used the pulpit to promote a brand of evangelicalism steeped in social reform, Stowe used her pen.

Uncle Tom's Cabin was not written in a vacuum. Many criticized the novel for its perceived sensationalism, but Reynolds argues that Stowe's treatment of slave life was quite mild compared to that of other popular reform novels of the era, such as George Lippard's dark and graphic *The Quaker City; or, The Monks of Monk Hall*. For Reynolds, Stowe's vision of reform was a moderate one. The novel celebrates women's rights but does not champion feminism. Her female characters are adventurous and sensual, but they are also virtuous and moral. The novel critiques capitalism and the slave system it produced, but it is not Marxist. It promotes temperance, but in a subtle and indirect manner.

The exception to Stowe's moderate approach, of course, is the novel's passionate and emotional condemnation of slavery. She was strongly influenced by some of the most radical abolitionists of her day, including Finney, Theodore Dwight Weld, Frederick Douglass, John Brown and Elijah Lovejoy. Stowe saw slavery as a national sin and hoped that her novel would help to eradicate it. When it came to the politics of slavery, she was the leading popularizer of the "higher law," a radical anti-slavery approach that "looked beyond the Constitution . . . to the law of natural justice, supported by God and morality." Stowe's commitment to higher law infuriated southerners, leading them to believe that if northern abolitionists were

Some southern states made it a crime to read Stowe's book.

given the opportunity, they would run roughshod over America's founding documents, especially the U.S. Constitution, which did not condemn slavery.

Southerners discouraged the sale of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and in some states made it a crime to read the book. Samuel Green, a Methodist minister and a free black man, was sentenced to ten years in the Maryland state penitentiary when a copy of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was found on his person. The South responded to Stowe's novel with proslavery literature, but none of it could reverse the influence of her pen.

The most fascinating part of *Mightier Than the Sword* is Reynolds's treatment of the effect *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had on culture, both at home and abroad. Leo Tolstoy thought that the novel had a greater cultural impact than the works of Shakespeare because it promoted "the brotherhood of God and man." It may also have had some influence on Lenin and the Russian Revolution of 1917. Shortly after the Civil War, the American stage became flooded with "Uncle Tom plays." Rather than contributing to racial stereotypes, these plays, according to Reynolds, empowered African Americans by depicting strong black characters, connecting blacks to spirituals and other manifestations of African-American culture and providing opportunities for black actors. The Uncle Tom plays

Reviewed by John Fea, who teaches history at Messiah College, Grantham, Pennsylvania, and is author of Was America Founded as a Christian Nation? A Historical Introduction (Westminster John Knox).

contributed to “a new kind of democracy.” Many of them provided a view of Jim Crow America different from the one presented in popular movies, such as D. W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation* (1915). In the 20th century, the novel and its various stage productions influenced positive portrayals of African-American life, such as Alex Haley’s novel and the television miniseries *Roots*.

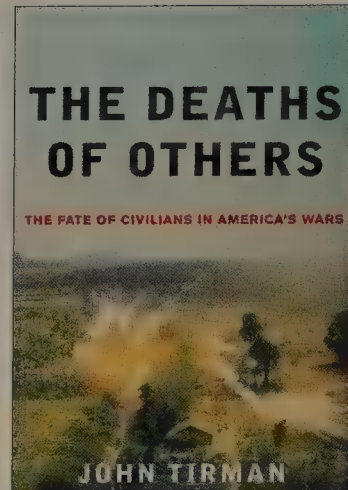
Finally, Reynolds considers the way that the character of Uncle Tom has been used as an epithet for African Americans who are considered to have accommodated too fully to white culture. Reynolds is puzzled by the way the lead character of Stowe’s novel has been used in this way. He interprets Uncle Tom as a strong, responsible, family-centered black male and concludes that this image of Uncle Tom has clearly “won the day” as “time proved that the era’s most effective force for social change was the firm-principled nonviolence of protesters like Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr.—that is, those who were closest in spirit to Uncle Tom as Stowe portrayed him.”

Uncle Tom’s Cabin sold 310,000 copies in its first year of publication, and many more Americans were exposed to Stowe’s story through family readings of the novel. After reading *Mightier Than the Sword*, I can’t help thinking that it may be time to put away the smart phone, shut down the computer and continue to allow Stowe’s novel to inspire us with a vision of Christian reform.

The Deaths of Others: The Fate of Civilians in America’s Wars

By John Tirman

Oxford University Press, 416 pp., \$29.95



Friedrich Nietzsche observed that the human capacity to forget is not solely the result of inertia: “It is rather an active and in the strictest sense positive faculty of repression.”

According to Nietzsche, we forget

not merely because we have to but because we want to—and we forget selectively, picking and choosing what we remember in order to construct the world in which we choose to live. At times such willful forgetting is an act of self-defense and even empowerment, but more often than not it is an act of self-deception. Frequently the results are tragic.

Nietzsche’s insights about the nature of forgetting inform and direct this work by John Tirman. *The Deaths of Others* explores the history of the wars in which Americans have engaged, going back to the time of the first European settlers 400 years ago and extending to current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Tirman, executive director of the Center for International Studies at the

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, seeks to uncover and explain a disturbing phenomenon: American wars are becoming more deadly, especially for noncombatants. Since the beginning of the 20th century, he writes, wars have caused the deaths of “more and more civilians as a share of total deaths, flipping the one-to-nine ratio of civilian-to-soldier mortality in the First World War to nine-to-one in many ethnic conflicts that occurred after the Cold War ended.”

Tirman argues that the majority of Americans largely ignore the realities of modern war, including the disproportionate toll that military actions take on noncombatants. Although many Americans recognize and mourn the significant number of deaths suffered by U.S. troops in Korea (33,000 casualties), Vietnam (58,000), Iraq (4,500) and Afghanistan (over 1,000), far fewer can speak accurately about the civilian death tolls in these same conflicts: 750,000 in Korea, over a million in Vietnam and hundreds of thousands each in Iraq and Afghanistan. The American Civil War and World War I were extremely bloody conflicts, to be sure, but they were typified by exchanges between military forces on battlefields, and civilian deaths were the

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exception. As has been the case with recent conflicts in which the United States has been involved, population centers are increasingly becoming the ground zero of modern war.

The United States is far from the only culprit in this changing calculus of war. Since the outbreak of World War II, Germany, Japan, North Korea, China, the Soviet Union, North Vietnam, Iraq and dozens of insurgent groups, among others, have contributed to the transformation of the nature of warfare and its victims. Tirman does not deny this fact. The United States, however, is his focus in this volume for at least two reasons.

First, Tirman argues that American politicians, military leaders and media have made a concerted effort to mask the toll suffered by civilians as a result of U.S. actions. The pattern is seen in President Truman's depiction of the dropping of atomic bombs on the Japanese population centers of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War II as acts of self-defense directed at military targets. It is found in Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's assurances to the American public that the Clinton-era economic sanctions against Iraq (which, according to UNICEF, resulted in the deaths of several hundred thousand Iraqi children from malnutrition and disease) were targeted at Saddam Hussein's regime and were worth it. The pattern also is evident in the media's reporting of the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq: according to one study of 1,800 network stories produced by ABC, NBC, CNN and other major outlets, only 4 percent of reports mentioned civilian casualties. According to Tirman, the truth about America's wars simply has not been told.

Second, Tirman concentrates on the United States because he believes that Americans exhibit a large and troubling gulf between perception and reality when it comes to war. Americans see themselves as the protectors of the innocent and the defenders of freedom. At least publicly, every 20th-century war that the United States has engaged in has been defended by means of just-war principles, often on overtly Christian moral grounds. Americans widely and steadfastly believe that the wars that they engage in are actions of last resort entered into for the purpose of protecting innocent life against unjust oppression. Americans see themselves as the good guys.

Reviewed by Timothy Renick, professor and former chairman of the department of religious studies at Georgia State University in Atlanta, where he serves as associate provost.

Why, then, are so many innocents dying as a result of American military actions? This is the question at the heart of *The Deaths of Others*, and Tirman's answers range from the historical to the mythical.

Part of what makes the United States distinctive, according to Tirman, is a pervasive indifference to the deaths of noncombatants that has been bred, in part, by a particular feature of U.S. wars over the past century: despite the horrific number of civilian deaths inflicted during World War II and the conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan, almost none of these deaths were suffered by American noncombatants on American soil. The attacks of September 11, 2001, provided Americans with a shocking, if momentary, glimpse into the realities of civilian death and suffering, but the number killed in those attacks—and the number

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directly affected by the loss of loved ones—pales in comparison to the number of civilian deaths caused by the subsequent U.S. military responses in Afghanistan and Iraq. “The deaths of many of your villagers affect your sensibilities about the conflict differently from the death of a neighbor fighting in an army far away,” Tirman tells us. Americans have the luxury of ignoring the horrible impact that war has on noncombatants because so few Americans have ever experienced the ravages of war.

Another part of what makes the United States unique when it comes to attitudes toward civilian deaths, Tirman explains, is a powerful myth about our national origins that still shapes the perceptions of millions of Americans (including many national leaders). The “errand into the wilderness,” as it was described by the Puritans at the time Europeans first settled in America, was presented as an inherently religious undertaking—a sacred covenant to spread God’s word to the heathen. Unlike the complexities and ambiguities of Christian sectarianism in the Europe they had left behind, what the settlers found in the new world was a crystal-clear dichotomy between Christian believers and unchristian indigenous peoples. In this mythical context, conflicts with native peoples inevitably assumed a religious significance. As Cotton Mather wrote at the time, “The spirit of God against whom we had *Rebelled*, permitted the *Devils*, from the *Depths of Hell*, to assault us.” Indians became identified with Satan, and attacks both from and upon native peoples soon became infused with religious purpose and meaning.

In a series of chapters, each dedicated to a specific American war, Tirman argues that this same mythic model defines how Americans perceive their nation’s military actions to this day. Whether fighting communists in Vietnam and Korea or Muslims in Iraq and Afghanistan, “the necessary conditions of regarding the native populations as savage . . . and the wars both as reactive and as an errand to the world’s tamable hinterlands were altogether present.” According to this interpretation, the United States is unique not because of the amount of violence it engages in, but because of the significance that Americans ascribe to this violence. Tirman explains, “The hope of vanquishing the communists and the Arab terrorists was more than mere defense or imperialism; it was a morality play in which the protagonist is triumphant physically (safe, secure, prosperous) and renewed morally through the completeness of triumph.”

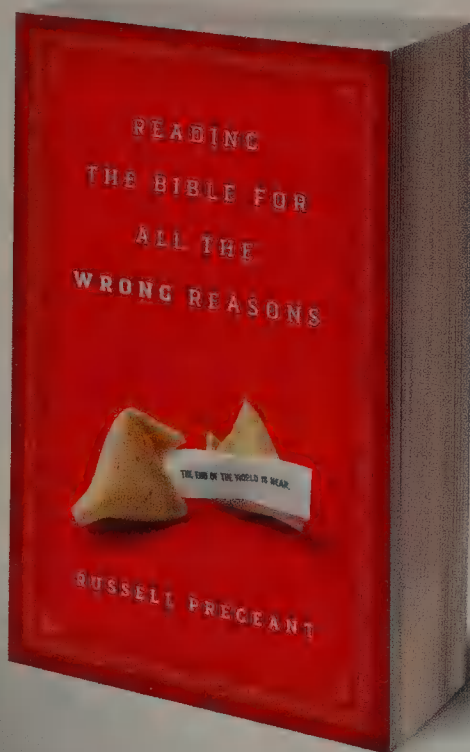
This mythic model works in one sense: it allows Americans to construct a reality that explains and justifies, at least to themselves, their violent actions. The myth mitigates the psychic terror of death by valorizing American military casualties as justified sacrifices to and for God, and it minimizes the significance of the deaths of others by casting the victims as heathen, savage and godless. As Tirman writes, “These powerful psychological constructs prospectively demonstrate how large majorities of the American public as well as the political and information elite could ignore the scale of mayhem that occurred in American wars in Korea, Vietnam and Iraq.”

Tirman suggests another sense in which the myth has failed the United States—with devastating impact on the nation’s global image. The victims of American military actions do not view our acts through the lens of the myth of American exceptionalism. They do not see the deaths of their neighbors and loved ones as part of God’s plan. Rather, they experience the civilian deaths caused by U.S. military actions much like Americans experienced the attacks of September 11—as unjust, devastating and requiring a response in kind. A difference exists between these two cases, though: the American acts of war do not last for a few hours and result in the deaths of thousands; in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq, they have lasted for years, with hundreds of thousands of civilians losing their lives.

Admittedly, Tirman presents a very harsh account of American foreign policy—one that many readers will contest. The power of *The Deaths of Others*, however, is its ability to get even the skeptical reader to confront a disturbing question: If, as a nation, Americans have indeed managed to forget the reality of our own military actions, is this an act of empowerment or is it a tragic delusion?

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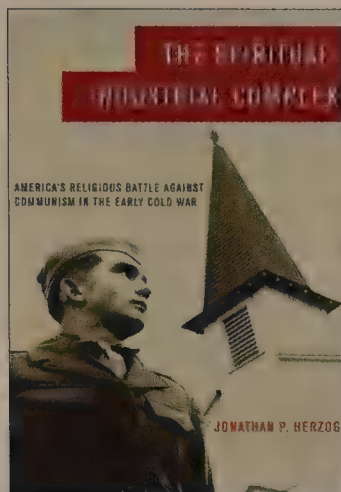


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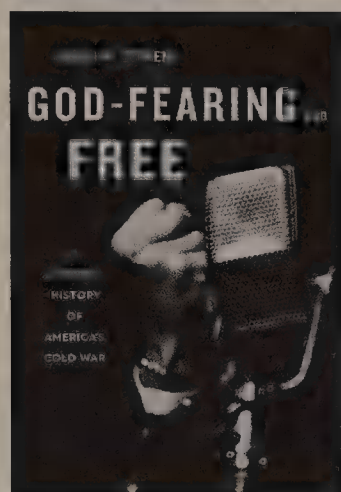
The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America's Religious Battle Against Communism in the Early Cold War

By Jonathan P. Herzog
Oxford University Press,
288 pp., \$34.95



God-Fearing and Free: A Spiritual History of America's Cold War

By Jason W. Stevens
Harvard University Press,
448 pp., \$39.95



For those of us who spent our grammar school days diving beneath school desks in the civil defense drills of the 1950s, the link between faith and the cold war was pretty obvious. We had to keep the communists at bay at any cost, and although it was never clear to me how a school desk would protect me against a Soviet attack, I understood full well that our family's contribution to the effort was crucial. We needed to maintain a fully stocked larder, recite the Pledge of Allegiance (including the newly inserted words "under God") at school every day, never—*never!*—eat snow and, most important, attend church every Sunday.

The stakes could not have been higher. Nothing less than the survival of the free world hung in the balance. God was counting on us in the titanic struggle against godless communism.

And we Americans, God's favorite people, did not disappoint. As Jonathan P. Herzog demonstrates in *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, the years following World War II witnessed a surge in both nationalism and religiosity: "Millions of Americans, from presidents on down, participated in a spiritual crusade—not with bullets or bayonets but with patriotic affirmations."

What set this crusade apart from previous religious awakenings, according to Herzog, was that the cold war revival was no grassroots affair. Instead, this surge of patriotic and religious piety, beginning under Harry Truman and intensified by Dwight Eisenhower, was orchestrated as carefully as D-Day or any of Eisenhower's military campaigns. Principals ranged from attorneys general and the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation to presidents, members of Congress, the publisher of *Time* magazine and Whittaker Chambers, whose best-selling book *Witness*, an account of his conversion from communism to Christianity, asserted the utter incompatibility of the two. "The religious could not be Communists," Herzog writes, "but even more important, the irreligious could not be true Americans." By 1949, only one in ten Americans believed that someone could be both a communist and a Christian.

Clergy and other religious leaders were complicit in this

conflation of piety and patriotism. Norman Vincent Peale and Billy Graham lent their credibility and their considerable constituencies to the effort. Fulton Sheen "became the era's pre-eminent Communist converter," thereby cementing the Roman Catholic Church's Americanness, which had been suspect only a world war earlier. The Knights of Columbus led the charge to add "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance. Richard Nixon weighed in by declaring that the "greatest service that can be rendered in public life today is to help in the revitalization and rebuilding of spiritual and moral strength in America."

The engines of government shifted into high gear. Prayers were prescribed for public school classrooms. At Fort Knox, Kentucky, Brigadier General John M. Devine required his recruits to attend religious services; those who objected to such coercion had to meet individually with a chaplain for one hour. The air force provided a B-25 with full crew to transport a representative from the Moody Institute of Science from base to base to evangelize the force and, not incidentally, refute Darwinism. The State Department stocked "information centers" around the world—places where foreigners could obtain reading materials about the United States—with Bibles and religious periodicals like *Commentary*, *Commonweal* and the *CHRISTIAN CENTURY*. Truman created the Psychological Strategy Board in 1951. "The overall objective in seeking the use of religion as a cold war instrumentality should be the furtherance of world spiritual health," the board declared, "for the Communist threat could not exist in a spiritually healthy world."

Perhaps the most impressive mobilization was an initiative called Religion in American Life (RIAL). Fueled by corporate contributions, RIAL began with a series of advertisements, produced by the J. Walter Thompson Agency, featuring such celebrity endorsers as Norman Rockwell, Jackie Robinson, J. Edgar Hoover and even the fictional Betty Crocker, all discussing the importance of religion. Truman kicked off the campaign with a live address. "Each of us can do his part by a renewed devotion to his religion," the president said. "If there is any danger to the religious life of our nation, it lies in our taking our religious heritage too much for granted." The RIAL campaign, which its head, General Electric president Charles E. Wilson, characterized as "spiritual rearmament," ran for the decade from 1949 to 1958.

Citizens responded. From 1951 to 1961, religious groups in the United States increased their membership by 31 percent. Twenty-five million Americans donated a dollar each to sign a traveling "Freedom Scroll," thereby making the following affirmation: "I believe in the sacredness and dignity of the individual. I believe that all men derive the right to freedom equally from God. I pledge to resist aggression and tyranny wherever they appear on earth." The Fraternal Order of Eagles installed the Decalogue in public buildings and city parks, and the Los Angeles chapter of the Kiwanis Club printed and distributed 20,000 booklets warning against the spiritual perils of communism.

Reviewed by Randall Balmer, an Episcopal priest and professor of American religious history at Barnard College, Columbia University. The second edition of his Religion in American Life: A Short History, co-written with Jon Butler and Grant Wacker, was released in August.

Herzog's very impressive historical research finds a decidedly more high-brow complement in *God-Fearing and Free: A Spiritual History of America's Cold War*, by Jason W. Stevens. The two authors plow some of the same furrows, notably the contributions of Graham and Chambers, but Stevens is far more ambitious. His sources range widely, from James Baldwin to Norman Mailer, and he sees both Graham and Reinhold Niebuhr as antimodernist critics in the cold war era, one from a conservative perspective and the latter from within the ranks of liberalism. Despite their differences, according to Stevens, "each was nevertheless broadly supportive of the Cold War consensus regarding the roles of American power and national interest."

Echoing Andrew S. Finstuen's *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants: The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr, Billy Graham, and Paul Tillich in an Age of Anxiety*, Stevens argues that Graham and Niebuhr both reminded Americans of the doctrine of original sin. "In the shadow of concerns about the spread of totalitarian systems," he writes, "original sin was refurbished and then mobilized in a variety of cultural discourses that aimed to shore up democratic society against threats preying on the nation's internal weaknesses." With this move, Stevens argues, "Protestant theological countermodernism, and with it the theme of ending innocence about human nature and progress, was recodified and deployed in the Cold War to justify America's emergence as a superpower among Western

nations and to instruct American citizens in their new role as defenders of freedom against totalitarian Communism."

In Herzog's account, the demise of the spiritual-industrial complex is just as intriguing as its origins. By the time Nixon and Nikita Khrushchev squared off in their infamous Kitchen Debate in 1959, Americans were seeking to peddle appliances, not Bibles, to godless communists. A series of Supreme Court decisions in the early 1960s, notably *Engel v. Vitale* on prayer in school, prompted John Kennedy to remark that the removal of prayer from the schools afforded parents the opportunity to reinforce their children's religious development at home.

The most acrobatic pivot was performed by Tom C. Clark, Truman's attorney general, who was appointed to the Supreme Court in 1949. As attorney general, Clark conceived the idea of a "Freedom Train," a traveling exhibition of America's founding documents. In 1947, Clark electrified the annual convention of the International Sunday School Association, meeting in Des Moines, Iowa, with his summons to piety in the national interest. "Never in the annals of time has the matter been reduced to such terrifying simplicity," he said. "It is a choice between God and Mammon." Clark concluded: "Let us build for the future on the rock of religion."

Sixteen years later, writing the majority opinion in *Abington v. Schempp*, a follow-up case on school prayer, Clark said that the state should give religion a wide berth. "We have come to recognize through bitter experience," he wrote, "that it is not within the power of government to invade that citadel, whether its purpose of effect be to aid or oppose, to advance or retard."

Although Herzog doesn't explore the reasons behind Clark's change of heart, the language of his opinion serves as a useful reminder about the dangers of conflating church and state, patriotism and piety. Does anyone seriously believe that the cause of religion was advanced by having "In God We Trust" emblazoned on our currency or shoehorning "under God" into the Pledge of Allegiance? Few would argue that the credibility of the state was harmed by this collusion of theology and nationalism. The integrity of the faith, however, is another matter.

In retrospect, it's not entirely fair to criticize religious leaders for their complicity in providing a theological gloss for America's cold war agenda. The rewards, at least in the short term—cultural relevance together with increased attendance, membership and giving—were palpable. And best of all, the costs were deferred, amortized over the Vietnam War, the counterculture and the ascendance of the religious right. Tragically, despite its immediate returns, American religious leaders' bargain of the 1950s turned out to be a Faustian one.

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Anna Carter Florence is the Peter Marshall Associate Professor of Preaching at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia and is an ordained pastor in the Presbyterian Church (USA). Her first book, *Preaching as Testimony*, was published in 2007 (WJKP).

Miroslav Volf - "*Christianity and Islam*"

Dr. Volf is founder and Director of the Yale Center for Faith and Culture and Henry B. Wright Professor of Theology, Yale University Divinity School, New Haven, CT. His most significant books include *Exclusion and Embrace* (1996) and *A Public Faith: On How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (2011).

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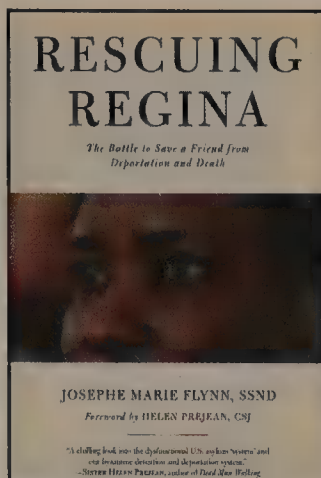
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Personal narrative

Rescuing Regina: The Battle to Save a Friend from Deportation and Death

By Josephe Marie Flynn
Lawrence Hill Books, 352 pp., \$26.95



This book should be made into a movie. As a book, the story has several strikes against it. The central character is not well known outside Milwaukee. The author, a 70-year-old nun, has written no other books. The cover is not sexy. And, heaven help us, it's a book about social justice and human rights—topics that market-driven book publishers rarely touch. Be honest: would you buy a book whose subtitle is *The Battle to Save a Friend from Deportation and Death*?

On the other hand, how would you feel about going to see a legal thriller that features political chaos, rape, torture and daring escapes, as well as a tender romance, miraculous interventions and really cute children? And suppose this story has a David-and-Goliath theme, in which the (incidentally gor-

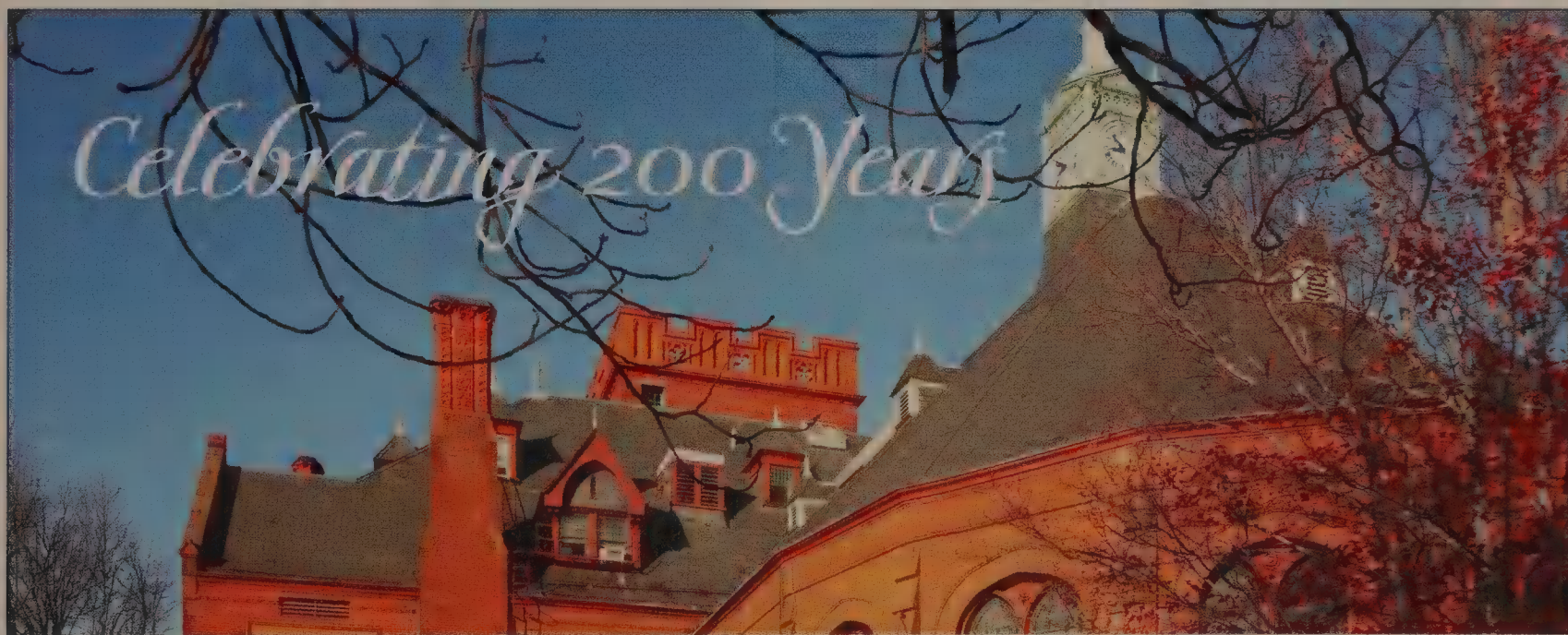
geous female) protagonist and her friends come up against brutal African rulers and hostile American bureaucrats—and win? Imagine this movie scene:

A quiet street in a humble Milwaukee neighborhood. Late March, 6:30 in the evening, dusk. Patches of dirty snow dot the yards. Families have turned on their lights; some have drawn their shades. Zoom in on one tiny bungalow, where three armed men wearing police vests are pounding on the front door.

The door opens a crack and two of the men push their way in. The man who stays outside hears shouting, banging, children crying. He looks at his watch. A woman screams. Soon the two men reappear, bringing a woman in pajamas and slippers with them. Children continue to wail as the men and the woman get into an unmarked car and drive away.

The woman is Regina—young, beautiful, Congolese. In her homeland in the early 1990s, she responded to her country's political unrest by working with a prodemocracy group. In 1994, just a few weeks after her marriage to another activist, David Bakala, soldiers disrupted a meeting where she was speaking, tied her up, viciously beat and kicked her, raped her

Reviewed by LaVonne Neff, who blogs at *Lively Dust* and reviews books at *the Neff Review*.



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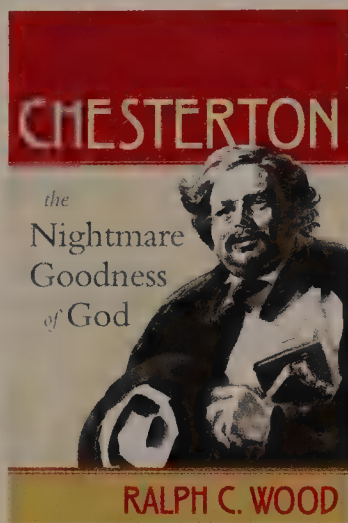


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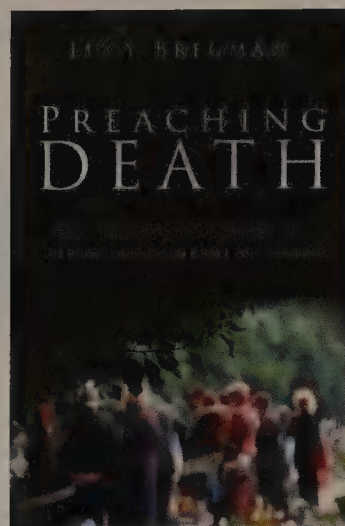
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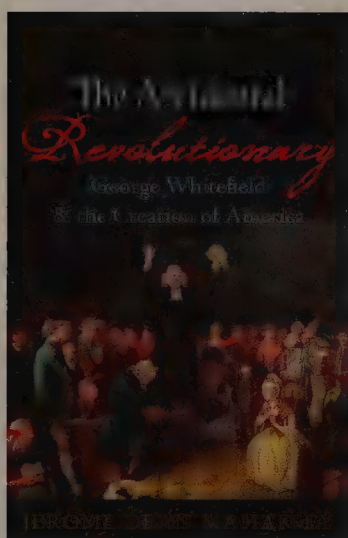
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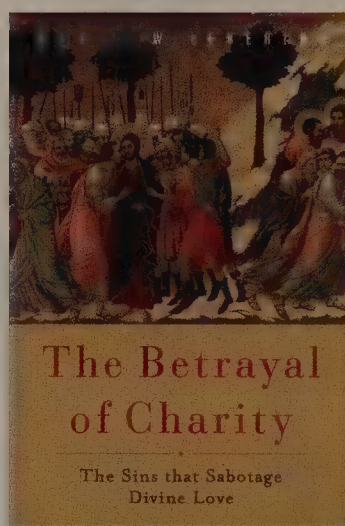
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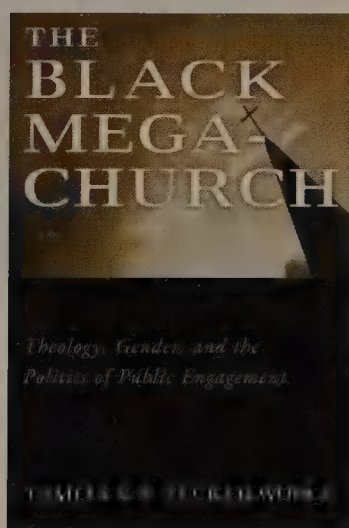
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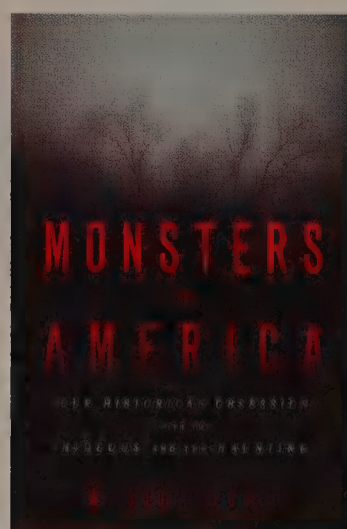
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at a time

and then marched her to a women's prison. For three months she lived with three other women in a small windowless room.

Once released, Regina was afraid to return home. She feared that David would reject her: in their culture, rape brings dishonor not on the rapist but on the woman and her family. David, however, welcomed her back, and she resumed her political work. And then, nine months after the gang rape, she was raped again. Friends persuaded her that if she stayed in Congo, she would surely be killed. Without telling David, Regina procured a false passport, put a few personal items in a duffle bag and entrusted herself to a fisherman who propelled her through fog and rapids down the Congo River. It was the first stage of her journey to America—home of democracy, land of the free.

But being an asylum seeker in the United States was less promising than she anticipated. Never mind the gratuitous strip search she underwent upon landing at JFK Airport in New York City. The more serious problem was the U.S. immigration system's approach to "the huddled masses yearning to breathe free":

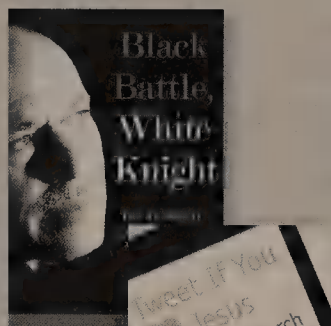
Put Regina, a non-English-speaking rape survivor fearing for her life, into a complex immigration process involving an adversarial, one-time-only hearing with a judge who has life-or-death authority over her. Start with well-meaning advice from people who don't know the system. Toss in a student translator, an overworked lawyer (make that three, none of whom listened to her story nor checked translations), a shrewd government attorney, and a flustered courtroom translator. Give her no preparation, which of course will kick her into posttraumatic stress. Then call her a liar.

Year after year, Regina persisted. In 1997 she was miraculously reunited with David, who had been captured, imprisoned, tortured, condemned to death—then suddenly spirited out of Congo, with strict orders never to return. He too applied for asylum, and he too ran into difficulties. But by 2000 the two of them thought they were here to stay. Now parents of a baby daughter, they moved from North Carolina to Milwaukee, joined a parish, found work, bought a house, made friends, had a son.

And then on March 22, 2005, with no warning, comes the knock on the door, an unauthorized search, threats, bullying—and Regina is whisked off to an American jail, her children's screams ringing in her ears.

If *Rescuing Regina* were a movie, it could court adolescent males by featuring explosions, battles, ghoulish torture and harrowing chase scenes. Or it could attract art-film buffs as a psychological study of two strong, intelligent, good people breaking down as they undergo persecution, posttraumatic stress disorder and America's Kafkaesque immigration system. But for broader appeal, it might focus on the two-year-long

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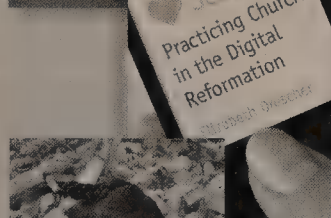
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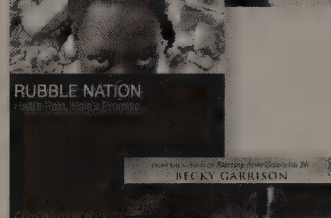
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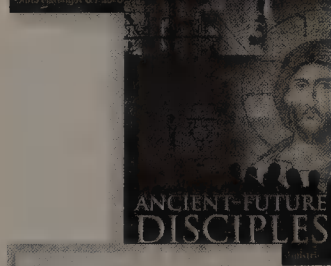
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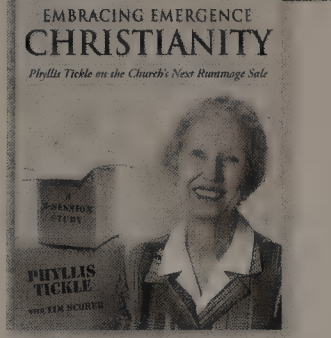
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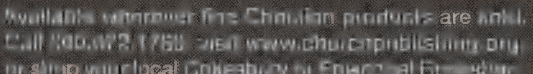
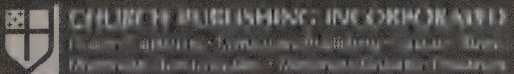
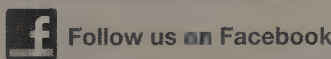
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effort of a determined nun and a tenacious lawyer, backed by thousands of concerned Milwaukee citizens—Democrats and Republicans together—to save Regina from certain deportation and death. On the one hand, a courtroom drama, seemingly insuperable obstacles, the power of the state. On the other, courage, persistence, the power of love—and enough suspense to keep you on the edge of your chair from beginning to end.

But *Rescuing Regina* is a book, not a movie, and that gives the author space to inform as well as entertain. Sister Josephe Marie Flynn had no interest in political activism until she met Regina and began learning what happens to people who seek asylum in the U.S. She learned, for example, that on any given day in 2005 the U.S. was holding 22,000 immigrant detainees (the figure for 2010 was over 33,000). Most of these prisoners, like Regina, are not criminals. Many are torn from their children. None are given the legal rights available to any U.S. citizen and required by international law, and many will be murdered if they are returned to their home countries. Yet they continue to be locked up in private, for-profit prisons “with no enforceable national standards” and operators who are “eager to maximize income and minimize costs.” Despite allegations of “sexual abuse, physical violence, medical neglect and mismanagement” in these prisons, lucrative government contracts continue to be awarded to them.

With no movie in sight, you’ll need to read the book to find out what happened once Sister Josephe began working for Regina’s release. Fortunately it reads like a novel even as it raises troubling questions of social justice.

Mighty Be Our Powers: How Sisterhood, Prayer, and Sex Changed a Nation at War

By Leymah Gbowee,
with Carol Mithers
Beast Books, 256 pp., \$25.99



Leymah Gbowee’s tranquil, relatively privileged life as a 17-year-old university student exploded in 1990 when war broke out in her homeland, the West African nation of Liberia. Today she is a spokesperson for women worldwide who are tired of war and want to build peace. Her memoir *Mighty Be Our Powers* tells the gripping story of the 21 intervening years. If you are looking for hope among the many news stories of conflict and violence, you will find it here.

And, if you are looking for an original, passionate memoir, you will find that too in this book. Listen to Gbowee describe her immersion into war after a childhood of peace: “When you move so quickly from innocence to a world of fear, pain and loss, it’s as if the flesh of your heart and mind gets cut away, piece by piece, like slices taken off a ham. Finally, there is nothing left but the bone.”

In 1996, six years after Charles Taylor began the rebellion that toppled the government of Samuel Doe and led to multiple struggles for power among warlords, Liberia lay in ruins. All the infrastructure—roads, hospitals, schools, electricity—was gone. Soldiers had shot up anything left standing, including light poles. More than 80 percent of the population was living below the poverty line. Little boys were toting AK-47s that they could hardly lift but knew how to shoot.

During this time, Gbowee was forced to survive any way she could. She accepted protection from a man who fathered her children but also beat her. The reader comes to trust the narrator as she goes from young bright star, to survivor, to abused woman, to mother and protector of many children, to peacemaker, to activist, to spokeswoman for all women and an international traveler, speaker and award winner.

The division of the book into three sections follows the classic three-act story structure, with the middle act slightly longer than the other two. This is a memoir that reads like a novel; it is built on the classic rhythm of introduction, call and response, and conclusion.

The climax of the story takes place in

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the second act. Gbowee was part of a group called the Women in Peacebuilding Network, and she was so devoted to its cause that she sometimes took her blanket and pillow and slept in the office overnight. One night she had a vivid, disturbing dream without images but with a clear voice speaking to her in the darkness: "Gather the women to pray for peace!" At 5 a.m., when she awoke, Gbowee was shaking. Her first thought was of the unworthiness she felt.

Women in Ireland and in Bosnia had previously banded together across warring lines to work for peace, but this kind of peace movement had never sprung up in Liberia before.

Gbowee heard a voice saying, "Gather the women."

As Gbowee began to act on the vision she had been given, her diffidence began to fall away and her confidence increased. In April 2002, about 20 Lutheran women gathered and began to form the Christian Women's Peace Initiative. The rest of the book tells the story of how the small initiative grew into a Christian-Muslim national movement and of how women demanded and eventually wrested peace from male leaders.

Gbowee's memoir can be read as a classical spiritual journey. At first the disruptive forces of war cause Gbowee to lose her untested faith. Later she finds great strength in prayer, in hymn singing and in the promise of Isaiah 54:11, a verse she returns to over and over again: "I will lay thy foundations with sapphires." She also supports her Muslim sisters in their faith practices.

The image of Jesus as Prince of Peace and as revolutionary peacemaker gives Gbowee strength as she joins other women in confronting the powers and principalities in a prolonged and costly war. At one point in the battle for peace, women wearing white begin to appear in a field near a fish market where Gbowee had played soccer as a child. As the women appear, she finds the words they need to hear: "In the past, we were silent, . . . but after being killed, raped, dehumanized and infected with diseases, and watching our children and families destroyed, war has taught us that the future lies in saying *no* to violence and *yes* to peace! We will not relent until peace prevails!"

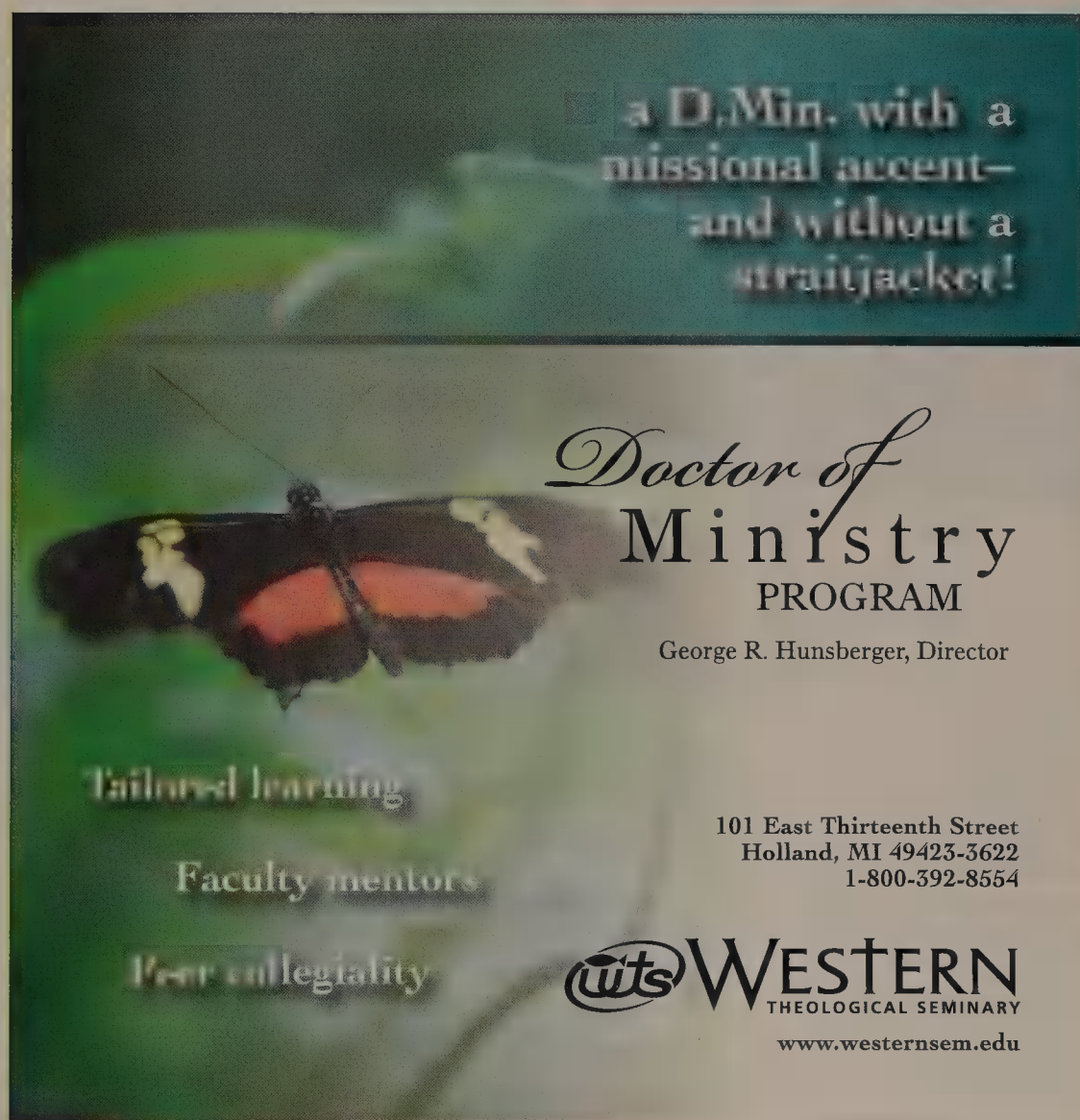
Reviewed by Shirley H. Showalter, a writer and consultant from Harrisonburg, Virginia, who blogs at 100memoirs.com.

The story that follows, wherein the women face their own potential divisions and overcome both internal and external threats, is as thrilling as any come-from-behind victory story. It is not surprising that the story became a prize-winning film, *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*, produced by Abigail Disney in 2008. This fall *Women, War and Peace*, a new series that includes Gbowee's story (and is also coproduced by Disney), will premiere on PBS.

Today Liberia is slowly recovering from protracted warfare, having elected Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in 2006 as its first woman president, an outcome unimaginable two decades ago. Sirleaf, the only female head of state in Africa, benefited from the way her Liberian sisters stood up to both Charles Taylor and the rebels and sang and prayed their way to peace.

One of the reasons this memoir grips the reader is that the voice is so honest. Gbowee turned down multiple invitations to take political positions or prestigious jobs. She tells us how she slipped into alcohol dependency and then conquered it, and she explains why she feels shame for staying with an abusive man and continuing to have his children even though she didn't love him.

Gbowee states in the conclusion that one of her desires is to run for parliament in Liberia. This book could be for her what *Dreams from My Father* was for Barack Obama—an introduction to her soul.



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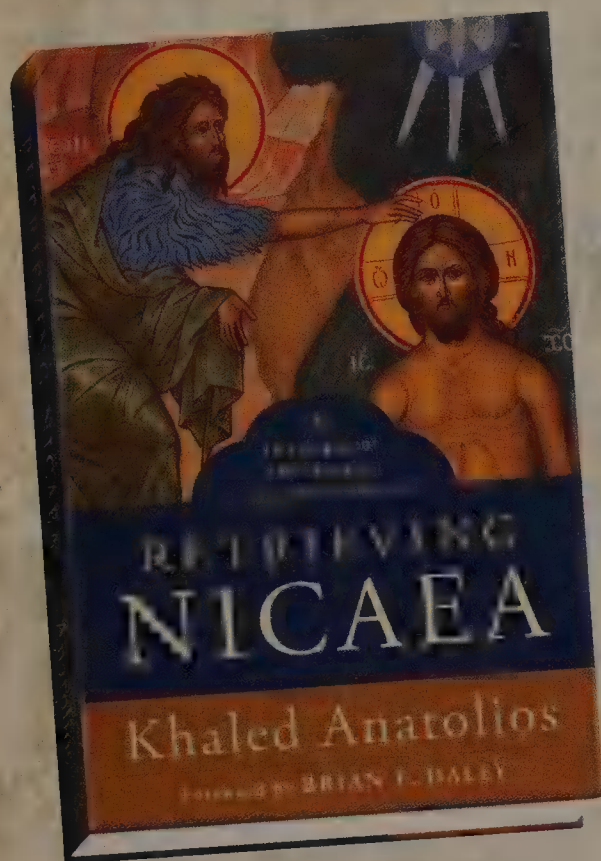
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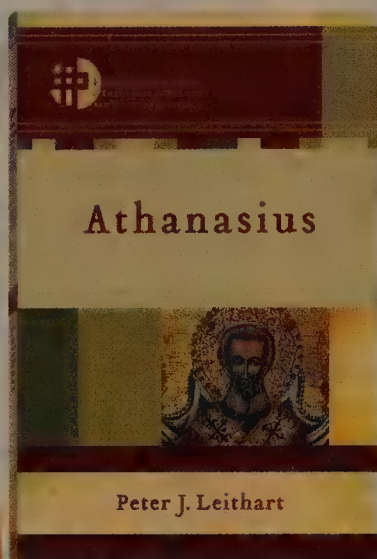
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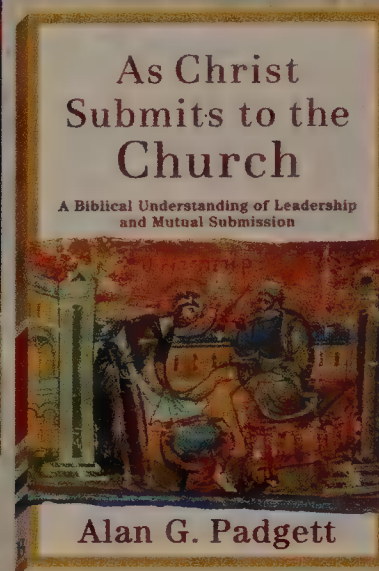
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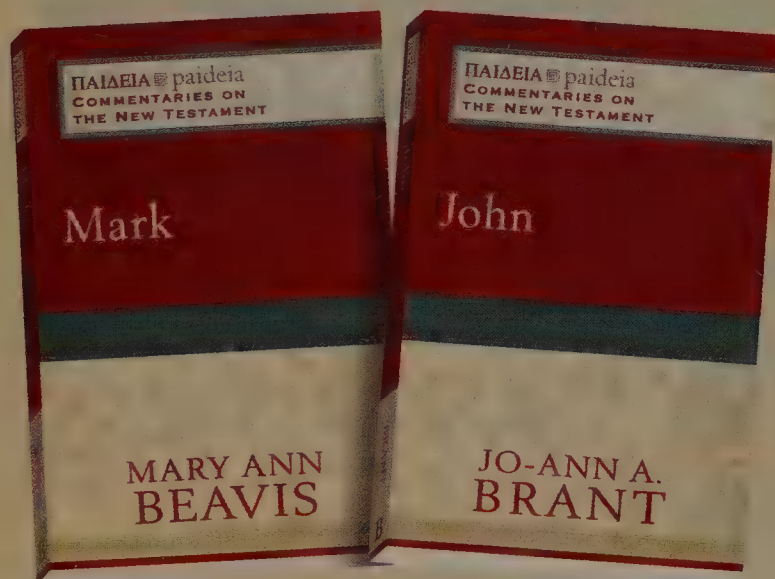


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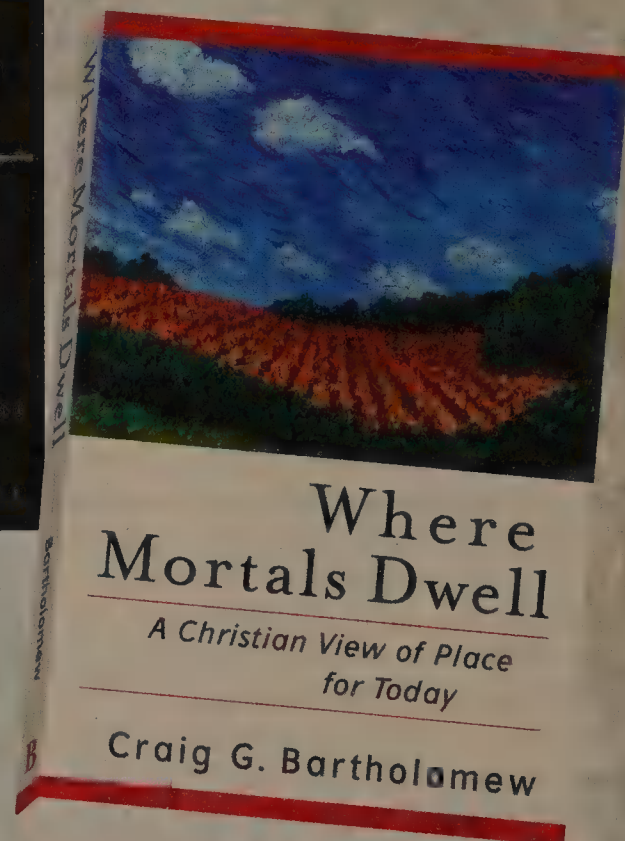
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Fiction

A Visit from the Goon Squad

By Jennifer Egan
Random House, 352 pp.,
\$14.95 paperback



Jennifer Egan's novel won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and a clutch of other awards this year. It is at once a sharp social commentary, a showcase for the author's virtuosity, and a constellation of stories so good they invite fast, compulsive reading but also reward more careful attention. It is also a book with particular relevance for Christian theology and ethics.

The language of outsider authenticity has done much to orient Christian reflection in recent decades. There have been calls from many angles for some kind of Christian counterculture. Calls to let the church be the church, to keep it real and to resist empire have different content and suggest different courses of action. But they also share a vocabulary that emphasizes the need to carve out an identity against some overwhelming mainstream or another—capitalist, liberal, racist, consumerist, imperial, bourgeois, secular, denominational. In pointing out the pervasiveness of this vocabulary I don't mean to lump all these movements together. The differences between them matter very much. I also don't mean to caricature these movements in order to cast them aside. I count them as some of the most important directions of thought in our time. I only mean to argue that the shared vocabulary of outsider authenticity demands more critical attention. Egan gives readers just that.

The novel assembles a series of stories about people involved in social scenes where the rhetoric of authentic counterculture and sold-out mainstream has burned with special intensity: punk rock and public relations. If these scenes seem miles apart by the measure of authenticity, most of the characters in the novel find themselves moving between them. One of the most vividly drawn characters, Sasha, leaves home to travel with a band, turns tricks and robs tourists to get by in Naples, gets back on her feet at NYU, endures the death of her best friend, goes to work for a record label, finds her old habit of stealing coming back, marries a man with whom she shares a tragedy and, at the end, assembles found bits of life into sculptures—and a family—that she knows will not last forever but loves all the more fiercely for that.

The book is full of characters like Sasha. Their lives confound the mythical narratives generated by the rhetoric of outsider authenticity. They don't fit the story of starting pure and selling out (Green Day, Billy Idol), and they don't fit the story of staying pure without counting the cost (Negative Trend, Darby Crash). Those twin stories shape the imaginations of Egan's characters, even as the ironies of their lives tie these

stories into knots. The kid with the Mohawk who becomes president of a recording company finds himself encountering racism at the country club. This leads to the collapse of his marriage and makes him more of an outsider than ever. He ends up old and irrelevant, trying to scratch his way back into the action, just like when he started out. And the fat, middle-aged rock star who launches a "suicide tour" in a desperate bid to regain his street cred ends up retiring happily to a dairy farm.

The drive for purity leads sometimes to a dairy farm, sometimes to rehab, sometimes to death, but never to a beautiful corpse. The myths are always present but never quite true. Egan's core characters know this. They don't completely believe in the narratives of outsider authenticity, even as they use those narratives to make sense of their lives.

Egan, born in 1962, gives us stories of people who grew up in the rubble of the Age of Aquarius. "Nineteen eighty is almost here, thank God," says one of Egan's characters, a young woman who is in but not quite of the Bay Area punk scene. "The hippies are getting old. . . . We're sick of them." Egan's characters grow up knowing they'll get old too and sell out—or that they'll die young. One way or another, the passage of time will rob them of the purity of outsider adolescence. "Time's a goon," one character says. And Egan's characters live with the knowledge that the goon squad comes for everyone.

The stories of these characters interlock in intricate ways. They jump between past and future times spanning almost 50 years. Characters the reader meets around the edges of one chapter move to the center of another. The book doesn't follow

For Egan's characters, authenticity is just another kind of myth.

every lead. Not every person who enters the story gets a chapter of his or her own. But the book follows enough leads, and in surprising enough ways, that it invites readers to meet every character as someone who is the center of her or his own story. One of the great gifts of the book is its ability to enlarge readers' sympathies. It encourages us to meet what look like the flattest of stock characters and to learn to know them as people with joys, sufferings, and plans of their own.

The multiplicity of characters is matched by a staggering variety of narrative styles. Egan offers chapters of first-person narrative, second-person narrative and more-and-less omniscient (and more-and-less reliable) third-person narrative. She has written a chapter that is a brilliant parody of celebrity journalism—that most sold-out of genres—as it might have been done by an acolyte of David Foster Wallace, the great outsider. She tells what is perhaps the most moving story of all in a series of slides that could have been composed in PowerPoint. Egan's virtuosity is at odds with the stripped-down brutalism of the

Reviewed by Ted A. Smith, who teaches ethics and society and is director of the Program in Theology and Practice at Vanderbilt Divinity School.

book's punk icons of purity. They might spit on such technical mastery as a kind of selling out. But Egan pulls it off with grace, wit and unwavering fidelity to her characters.

All the chapters are connected, but they never fit together as a whole, so the form of the book embodies the experience of time it describes. With a nod to Proust's "episode of the madeleine," Egan uses pop songs to launch reveries in which her characters recall the lost time of outsider adolescence. The recollections are always marked by consciousness of a discontinuity—a pause—between past and present. Egan's characters experience time not as epic but as episodic. They find them-

selves wondering how they got (in a phrase that structures the whole novel) "from A to B." "I don't know what happened to me," one character says. "I honestly don't." "You grew up," his companion replies, "just like the rest of us." But how did it happen? There are gaps in the story that can't be filled.

The final chapter makes clear the grace of those gaps. Set in a dystopian time not too far into the future, it describes a world that has perfected the process of producing outsider authenticity as an effect. In that setting, public relations professionals generate word-of-mouth communication through "parrots." The best parrots have some semblance of authenticity themselves,

and Alex, who remembers the lost time of "his young self, full of schemes and high standards," fits the bill. But he worries about selling out. Lulu, the coolly brilliant publicist, talks him into it. Manufacturing authenticity is just like any other work, she says. "I mean, is a person who sells oranges *bought*? Is the person who repairs appliances *selling out*?" Lulu is a generation younger than Alex, and she grew up believing that authenticity was an effect all along. She does not recall a lost time of purity. With no lost time, there is no gap in her life story.

The contrast between Lulu and Alex illumines the glorious tangle of stories that have come before. As Lulu realizes, the ideal of outsider authenticity becomes a fiction as soon as it is deployed—whether to sell records, create a crowd or win a hearing for a theological argument. But something precious is lost if we give up any attachment to the ideal of outsider authenticity. The recollection of a lost time of purity, even if it depends on an ideological forgetting, can interrupt a narrative that is driving toward death. It can create the gap, the pause, that opens up the possibility of new life on the other side.

A Visit from the Goon Squad ends a little too neatly, with the husk of an outsider's performance catching fire to become the real thing. Egan has already given us too many reasons to question that reality for the ending to be satisfying. But her turn as a punk-rock Proust still has much to teach those of us trying to imagine forms of Christian life today. The novel can expand our sympathies, complicate our breezy talk about narrative and press us to think again about the time of redemption. Most of all, it can help us understand the need for counter-cultural dreams in an age when they are so readily co-opted by the very powers they would oppose.

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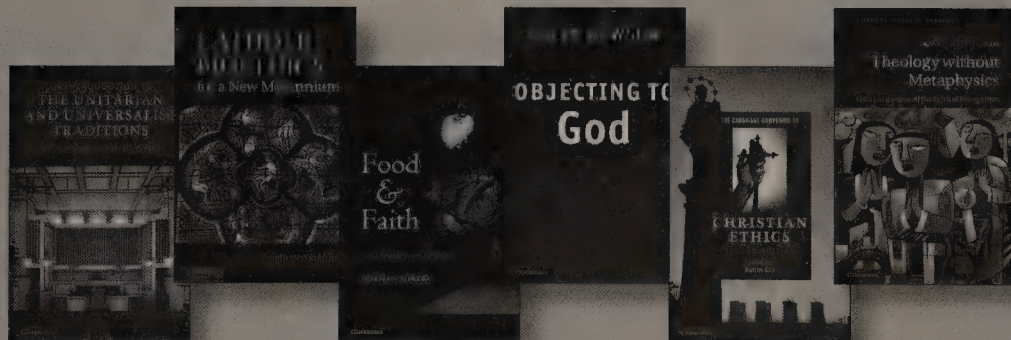
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Irma Voth: A Novel

By Miriam Toews

Harper, 272 pp., \$23.99

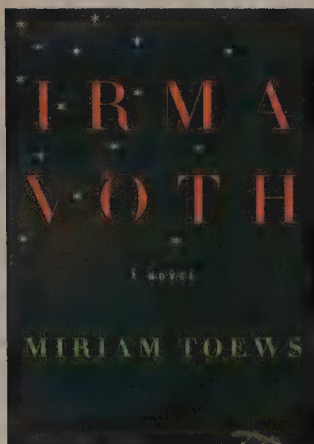
Many, many things happen in Miriam Toews's slim new novel—drug dealing, a shotgun wedding, filmmaking, filicide, teenagers running away, political protests—and all of them happen in a year of the life of Irma Voth, a 19-year-old Mennonite living in Mexico.

The Voth family, headed by a bullishly strict father, live in Manitoba until the death of Irma's older sister prompts their move to an isolated Mennonite community in the Chihuahua desert. The isolation isn't sufficient, however, to prevent Irma from meeting and marrying the delinquent and forgettable Jorge. Irma's father disapproves of the marriage. He stops speaking to Irma, but he also insists that Jorge and Irma live in the house next door and continue to work on the family farm.

Jorge seems to regret almost immediately the situation he's gotten into and spends the bulk of his time driving to Mexico City in pursuit of disreputable business ends. Irma, estranged from her father and her community and largely abandoned by her husband, at first spends the bulk of her time alone with her wry observations. Her life, already full of regret and broken relationships, has made her cynical and quite funny. This is how she talks about an aunt and uncle who left the community, to her father's horror:

If my dad's assessment was accurate this place was teeming with narcos, and not just garden-variety narcos but narcosatanics in search of sensations, . . . poised to bolt for bigger thrills while the rest of us were in it for the long haul, working hard and honestly for very little money, the way God meant for us to be. But I didn't believe it. I think my uncle got a job selling cars in Canada and Wilf wanted to study the violin and my aunt thought it would be cool to get a perm. But who knows. Maybe they're a family of drug lords now, throwing bodies out of helicopters and bowling with the heads of double-crossers. That would be my father's theory.

Reviewed by Janet Potter, CENTURY editorial assistant.



Not content with just the ill-advised marriage and the family rift as outlets for Irma's disillusionment, Toews introduces a Mexican film crew, who have arrived in Chihuahua to make a movie about the lives of Mexican Mennonites. Living in a house in the neighborhood and using members of the community as actors, the filmmakers tell the story of a Mennonite man who has an affair. Irma is hired as a translator for the crew and actors, and before long she and her younger sister Aggie are spending their days with them. As the shoot draws out and the director has to provide larger and larger bribes to maintain the cooperation and tolerance of the locals, Irma and Aggie are caught between the lure of their artsy new friends and the increasing wrath that the friendship provokes in their father.

In this highly populated scenario, the novel starts to feel a little crowded. Irma is charming the film's director, Diego, bonding with its lead actress, a German hippie, flirting with one of the crew, bickering with her sister, exchanging silent glares with her father, wondering about her absent husband, helping to smooth things over with the film's cast and narrating her own crisis of faith. Irma's descriptions of it all are consistently pithy. When Aggie, who frequently sneaks away from their father's house to visit Irma, asks if she can move in with her, Irma replies, "Well . . . are you looking for a quick and easy way to complicate your life forever?"

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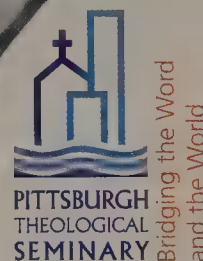
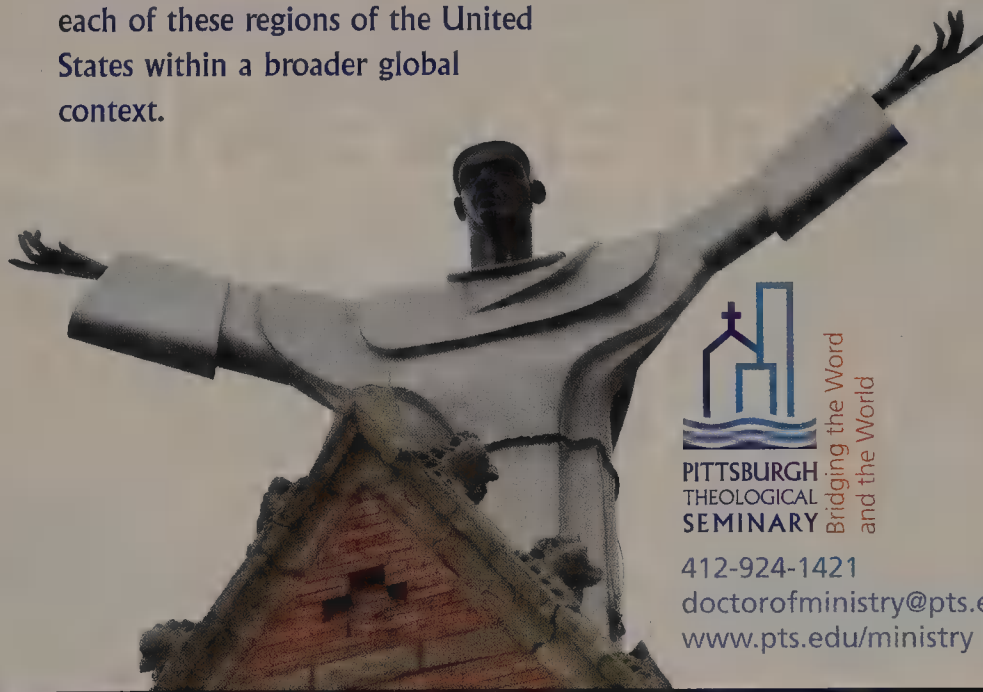
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This raises the question of why Irma's life is so complicated. For a teenager living in the desert, she's got a lot going on. The film depicted in the novel is based on—and is almost identical to—the 2007 film *Silent Light*, which costarred Toews herself as the jilted wife. *Silent Light* is a slow, calm, meditative film, in which several minutes frequently go by without audible speech. Fictional filmmaker Diego's depiction of the Chihuahuan community is similarly bucolic and makes Irma's life look like vaudeville in comparison.

A tangle of a story is told by a funny, cynical Mennonite.

"I felt like I should have said other more important and unique things," Irma thinks once, during a late-night talk with one of the film crew. But as is common in the novel, the meaning of the moment barely lands before Toews whisks off to other things.

Toews occasionally reiterates the idea that people use others as props for their own emotion. This is certainly in evidence in *Irma Voth* in the way Irma's father uses his daughters

to exercise his faith, Diego uses the locals as marionettes, and Irma uses anyone who's not her family as an object in her trying on of new identities. Perhaps this whirl of projection and lopsided relationships is why the many characters feel omnipresent and yet disposable—so many of them are pictured only insofar as they are useful or cumbersome to someone else. Irma and, to a lesser extent, Aggie are the only characters given room to breathe. But the biting and funny voices of the two sisters are worth focusing on, and it's understandable that Toews would push others to the side to make room for them.

Irma cycles through four identities in the short span of the novel. Starting as a stifled daughter, she becomes a rebellious young wife, then finds herself part of a film crew, until she throws over even that for a new life. One fewer incarnation might have fit more nicely.

When Irma meets her baby sister for the first time, her sister "had fallen asleep all wrapped up in the towel, soaked in sweat and with a sweet expression on her face that underneath it seemed to say fuck you all, I possess vital intangibles and when I learn to talk the world will know its shame." This mandate could belong to Irma herself. Her wise and resilient narration, cutting through the tangles of the story, is the book's greatest achievement.

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Faith MATTERS

by Carol Zaleski

Virtues of knowing

IT WAS THE second Sunday in Lent and, following an ancient Christian practice, the gospel reading for the day was an account of the Transfiguration.

The first-graders, who would receive their first communion in a few weeks, were stationed in the front pews. Our pastor, as is his custom on such occasions, came down from the pulpit to address them in simple words. He began by quizzing them gently about the readings. "I wonder if you can help us understand this story about Jesus and his friends." The children had been well coached and had no difficulty answering his prompts. "Where did Jesus and his friends go?" "To a mountain!" "Who was standing next to Jesus?" "Moses!" "Anyone else?" "Elijah!"

Turning to the congregation, our pastor began to sum things up: "The disciples were obviously astonished to see Christ in glory standing next to Moses and Elijah. They could not have understood that they were witnessing a prefiguring of the resurrection." In the midst of this discourse, a little girl in the front pew raised her hand to ask a question: "Father," she said, "what does 'obviously' mean?"

Our pastor was prepared to be asked what resurrection means; but *obviously*? Leave it to a first-grader to raise the tough questions.

It got me thinking, though. What, in fact, does *obviously* mean? How can we be sure that we are all sufficiently on the same page to call an inference obvious (in this case, that the disciples were astonished to see Christ in glory because they did not foresee the resurrection)?

Like *plainly* or *naturally*, *obviously* suggests an observation or inference that is present to all minds, public, self-evident and in every way unlikely to produce a *bouleversement*. It cannot be momentous to realize a truth that is obvious. There's nothing astonishing about the statement that Peter, James and John were astonished; who wouldn't be? The Transfiguration is an extraordinary and momentous story, but if we step inside its framework, we find that all the ordinary rules of logic and human psychology still apply.

To take a different instance: a friend of mine has a spiritual life coach who channels an entity named Enoch from a different space-time continuum. ("I wonder," my friend remarked to me the other day, "if he is the same as the biblical Enoch.") It turns out that my friend's Enoch, though extradimensional, is a font of sensible advice, full of obvious truths about relationships, money and dieting. These obvious truths hold good even though the framework of the story is, as far as I can see, obvious nonsense.

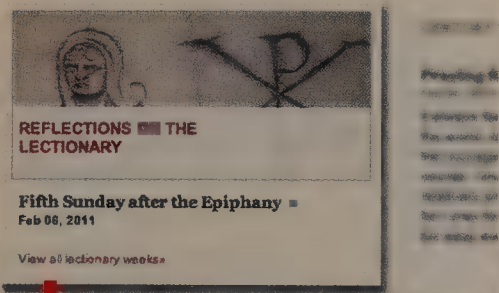
Again, it makes me wonder: what are the conditions for a judgment to have a force like that of self-evidence? Conversely, how far can we trust our impressions of what's obvious if we're surrounded by people who don't share them? The desire for knowledge, as Aristotle maintained, is as natural as the desire for happiness—and just as fundamental to human flourishing. Where rival knowledge claims abound, the ability to discriminate between them is a basic survival skill. Christians have to contend with the fact that to the skeptic, the only obvious point about the Transfiguration account is that Peter, James and John were caught up in a shared hallucination, while to the credulous, the story is readily believable but on the same level as the trance communications of the extradimensional Enoch.

Is there a knowledge doctor in the house? Fortunately, yes: there are epistemologists—philosophers who investigate what it means to know something and to know that we know it. More than one epistemology sits comfortably with Christian faith, but the best approach, to my mind, would be one that combines the attractive characteristics of a pragmatist (open-mindedness, corrigibility, trust, sociability) with the confidence in reason of a realist and the humility, curiosity and teachability of a child.

Among new approaches to the theory of knowledge, "virtue epistemology" (Ernest Sosa gave it this name in 1991) has much to recommend it; and among virtue epistemologists, Linda Zagzebski (author of *Virtues of the Mind*, among other books) has much to offer Christians trying to navigate the contemporary intellectual world. Twentieth-century epistemology typically defined knowledge as "justified true belief," but Zagzebski treats knowledge as, in effect, virtuous belief. "A belief that is *good in every respect*, like an act that is good in every respect, has the following features," Zagzebski writes. "(1) It is virtuously motivated. (2) It imitates the behavior of virtuous persons in relevantly similar circumstances. (3) It reaches the truth because of features (1) and (2)." Zagzebski focuses attention on the character of the knower and on the crucial role that virtues and good affections like trust, admiration, courage, responsibility and humility play in forming true beliefs. Her approach is sapiential in the tradition of Anselm, John Henry Newman and (despite differences) Alvin Plantinga. Truth is objective; but to reach the truth is a striving that involves the whole acting, knowing, loving person—which is just what we were told when the Truth in person walked among us.

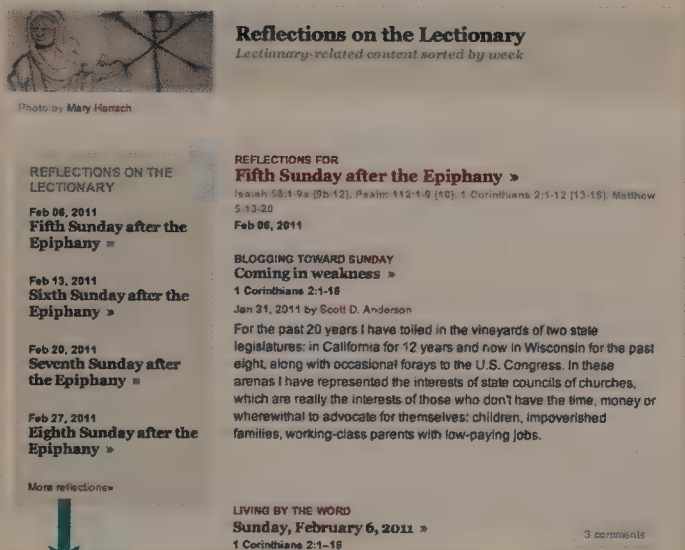
Carol Zaleski is professor of world religions at Smith College.

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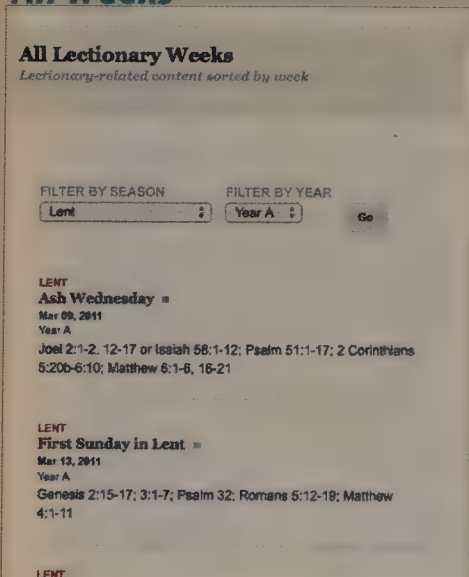
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ON Music

Night of Hunters by Tori Amos (Deutsche Grammophon)

As a pianist, Tori Amos's skill and classical pedigree are peerless in the pop world; as a songwriter she is talented but gratuitous and opaque. So while it's hard to imagine many pop artists signing up to write a song cycle based on the history of classical music, for Amos—whom Deutsche Grammophon approached with this idea—the project seems almost inevitable.

Night of Hunters strains under its conceptual weight. The composition takes a largely theme-and-variations approach, forgoing verse-chorus pop form—something Amos has always held loosely—in favor of developing ideas a movement at a time. Within this structure Amos pays specific tribute to several composers from the last 400 years. As if that wasn't enough, the album is centered on the idea of hunting, a metaphor for a dying relationship. At some point we flash back to ancient Ireland, with themes of violence, paganism and female empower-

ment. There is also a peyote theme. Very little of this is clear on first listen.

Yet for all of its opaque excess, this is also the most musically cohesive and interesting thing Amos has put out in years. She's always been best at her most restrained, writing pristine (if lyrically inscrutable) pop songs and playing the hell out of them. The soulful "Job's Coffin" recalls a bit of this, as does the touch of American Songbook harmony and sentimentality in "Your Ghost" and "Carry." But what really makes the record work is the instrumentation. Amos's piano and voice are backed variously by a string quartet, a few wind instruments and the young voices of her daughter and niece—no rhythm section, no electronics. This versatile, all-acoustic sound weaves and swells to support the piano in a way her past arrangements seldom have.

And she sure can play. Amos's piano is moody, dynamic and endlessly textured. She can do a lot of things with her voice as well, from intimate whisper to pop chanteuse to emotive diva. Don't let Amos the over-the-top auteur distract you from Amos the astonishing performer.

We Are Rising by Son Lux (Anticon)

Earlier this year, NPR's *All Songs Considered* solicited Ryan Lott, aka Son

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Lux, for an experiment: could he write and record an album in one month?

Lott agreed. *We Are Rising* recalls his excellent debut *At War with Walls and Mazes*, but its quick-and-dirty creation lends it a more varied sound. Lott is an arrangement-and-production savant, aggressively blending electronic experimentation with orchestral instruments—and conventional rock instruments used sparingly to make them count. His several guest singers mostly provide texture; the lead vocals Lott handles himself with limited range but striking character.

The key ingredient, however, is Lott's pop sensibilities. With heavily layered electronic music, it's hard to separate composition from arrangement. Yet it's easy to picture an adept guitar pop band reimagining these richly varied songs, from the detuned opening long chords of "Flickers" to the closer "Rebuild," which, like a 16-year-old boy, lives in the tension of being near the dance floor but not on it.

4X4

by Works Progress Administration
(self-released)

Works Progress Administration is a loose collective of a supergroup, primarily a collaboration between Glen Phillips and Sean Watkins. Phillips fronts the recently reunited Toad the Wet Sprocket, a mellow guitar rock band that stood out in the 1990s for its great songwriting and sound, its ambitious (and sometimes religious) themes and its ridiculous name. Watkins is best known as part of the defunct progressive bluegrass band Nickel Creek, and WPA's self-titled debut suffered from some of his former band's slick acoustic excess.

This four-song extended-play album puts a better foot forward. It presents WPA as a scrappy little folk rock band with tight harmonies and well-seasoned songwriting—especially by Phillips, who's at his earnest yet clever best on the tender divorce ballad "It's Over Now" ("Meet at the park and watch the kids playin' / Silently guess what the other's not sayin'").

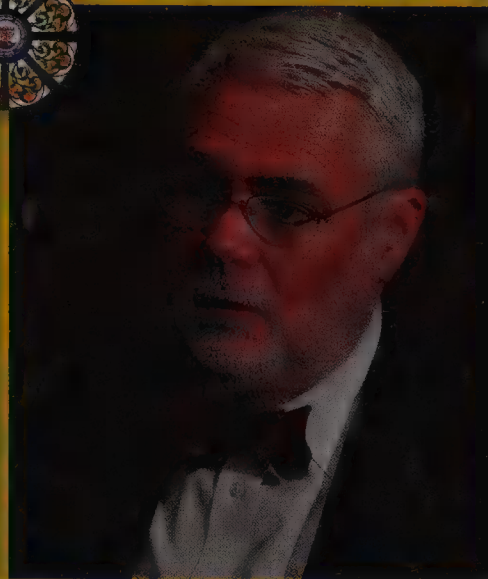
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C'mon
by Low
[SubPop]

The usually pejorative term *slowcore* was coined to describe Low's general minimalism and especially the glacial pace at which the Duluth, Minnesota, trio's songs develop. But patient listeners have always been rewarded with warm guitar sounds, memorable tunes and sweet harmony.

The band's latest was recorded in the same church space as fan favorite *Trust*, which is lush and rich with natural reverb but less accessible than its predecessor, *Things We Lost in the Fire*. *C'mon* recalls both records, reprising *Trust*'s churchy spaciousness but with greater doses of pop candy to help the echoing-drone meat go down. "Done" is a marvel of old-fashioned songwriting, a simple rock-and-roll ballad progression seasoned with three-part harmonies. It's also classic Low, its short running time due not to a tight little verse form but to the fact that there's only one verse.

Tell My Sister
by Kate & Anna McGarrigle
[Nonesuch]

The McGarrigle sisters (Kate died of sarcoma last year) were more successful in their native Canada than in the States, but they were deeply admired by those who covered their songs: Emmylou Harris, Linda Ronstadt, Maria Muldaur, Kate's son Rufus Wainwright.

This three-disc collection features remastered versions of the sisters' 1976 self-titled debut album and its follow-up, *Dancer with Bruised Knees*; the third disc is a collection of unreleased material. The songs are folk-rooted but broadly adventurous; often playfully funny, they are rarely ironic or biting. The anglophone Quebecois duo worked mostly in English but occasionally in French; they sing beautifully in both languages. And their perfectly blended sibling harmony—sometimes country-close, sometimes with one up high and one down low—is gently lovely at any volume.

— Steve Thorngate

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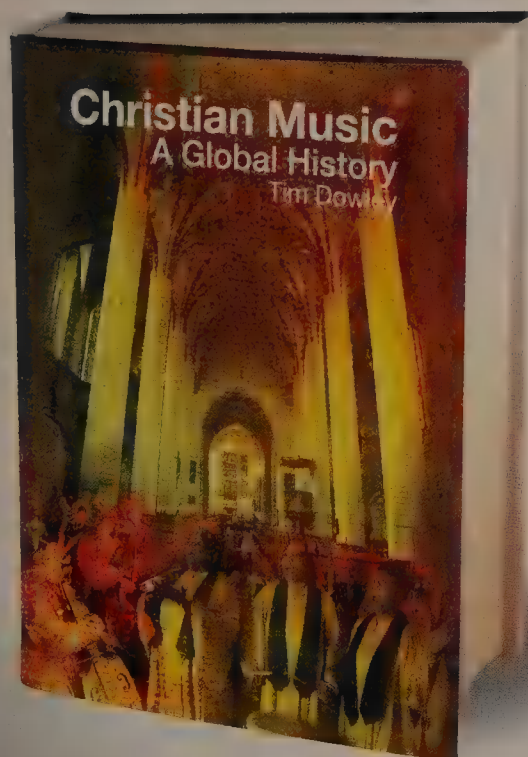
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ON Film

The Help
Directed by Tate Taylor
Starring Emma Stone and Viola Davis

In *The Help*, set during the civil rights era, an aspiring journalist decides to write a book about the African-American domestics in the small Mississippi town where she grew up. The movie, adapted by Tate Taylor from Kathryn Stockett's best seller, is a glossy Hollywood potboiler that uses a serious theme and historical context as cover. It's melodrama passing as drama.

The preposterous fable sets a group of spirited, courageous, loving black women against the white-gloved white women of the Junior League who abuse them. These caricatured villains are led by Hilly Holbrook (Bryce Dallas Howard), who sends her maid, Minny Jackson (Octavia Spencer), out in a hurricane to use an outhouse so she won't spread her diseases in the sacred Holbrook bathroom, then fires her summarily when Minny overrides her edict. Doubtless Hilly's mistreatment of Minny is no worse than what many domestics suffered in Mississippi, but the movie piles on so many offenses that Hilly and her cohorts begin to seem like the devil's spawn. The young wife (Ahna O'Reilly) who employs Aibileen Clark (Viola Davis) shunts her child onto Aibileen because she has no feeling for her. (She only intervenes to beat the little girl when she embarrasses her.)

Somehow the Junior Leaguers' prejudices have eluded Eugenia "Skeeter" Phelan (Emma Stone); she seems to have been shipped into town fully evolved from another culture. Skeeter wants to give the black women in her town a voice; she's also determined to find out what happened to Constantine Jefferson, a maid she adored who mysteriously vanished while she was at college. (In her two flashback scenes as Constantine, the legendary Cicely Tyson bestows a grace and dignity on the proceedings that they don't deserve.)



CIVIL RIGHTS MELODRAMA: In the Mississippi of 1963, Aibileen Clark (Viola Davis, left) and Minny Jackson (Octavia Spencer) protest unfair treatment.

The plotting verges on the lunatic. Skeeter and the maids somehow keep her project secret until the book comes out. The idea that they can pull this off in a goldfish bowl of a town is ridiculous—especially since Skeeter arrives at a Junior League luncheon with a copy of the Mississippi statutes governing nonwhites clearly visible in her mesh handbag. At one point Hilly uses Skeeter's possession of the document to threaten her, though exactly why anyone would object to a white woman reading the laws of her state isn't clear. (It's not as though the racists of Mississippi are pretending *not* to enact the Jim Crow laws.) The most scandalous story Skeeter hears involves an act of revenge Minny perpetrates against Hilly that, in the *real* Mississippi of the 1960s, would get her lynched.

It's appalling to use a chapter in American history that generated so many moving true stories as an excuse to whip one up that's so obviously fraudulent. And *The Help* has a built-in lie detector in the form of Viola Davis, whose characterizations are always so steeped in emotional authenticity that they expose the fakery around her. Davis gives a sensational performance as Aibileen. It's insulting to jack up the scene where Aibileen loses her job by inserting shots of the little white girl she's devoted to wailing and calling out her name. Luckily Davis is a pure emotional force who can't be tainted even by a movie as infuriating as *The Help*.

Sarah's Key
Directed by Gilles Paquet-Brenner
Starring Kristin Scott Thomas

Sarah's Key is culled from a popular novel (by Tatiana de Rosnay) set during the Holocaust and the Nazi occupation of France. The main character, an American magazine writer (Kristin Scott Thomas) living in Paris, discovers that her husband's family acquired their home after the Jews who once lived there were sent to an abandoned stadium, where they endured three hellish days before the Nazis transported them to the camps. The writer becomes convinced that Sarah, the family's little girl, escaped, and she tries to follow her trail.

The narrative reveals an obscure piece of history in which the French comported themselves like the SS. *Sarah's* is a fictional horror story centered on the trauma of a child who is haunted by an impulsive action she took in an effort to save the life of someone she loved. But it might easily have happened. *Sarah's Key* isn't an especially good movie, but it's touching and very well acted (especially by Thomas and by Niels Arestrup and Dominique Frot in flashbacks as a farmer and his wife). It doesn't cheapen its subject by manipulating either it or us.

Reviewed by Steve Vineberg, who teaches at the College of the Holy Cross.

by Rodney Clapp

American SOUNDINGS

Would Jesus love football?

The only good thing about the end of summer is that it's the beginning of the college football season. Once more college football is delivering thrills and surprises, with the rankings changing dramatically on a weekly basis, teams appearing out of nowhere to vie for the no. 1 ranking, and underdogs ceremoniously (college football is nothing if not ceremonious) knocking off highly favored teams. I love just about everything about the game, from the on-field heroics to the off-field pageantry.

But I make the qualification: *just about* everything about the game. I don't love

states such as Oklahoma, where I grew up. I was an offensive lineman, and one day in practice our coach decided we needed to improve our goal-line play. To challenge the first-string players, he bunched 15 reserves across from us on the one-yard line. I snapped the ball to the quarterback, delivered my block, then straightened up on my knees. It was then that a defender (my cousin, as it happened) pivoted and launched himself at the ball carrier. His heel came up under my faceguard and

sometimes severe brain injuries are the result of all that bell-ringing.

The concern about football violence is not new. A campaign to ban college football arose after 18 players died on the field in 1905. That famously rugged outdoorsman, President Teddy Roosevelt, convened panels to reform the sport. The next year the forward pass was introduced, transforming the game from what writer Ben McGrath called "militarized or corporatized rugby" to a kind of "contact ballet."

live with ambivalence about the game.

My fellow followers of the Prince of Peace who love the bucolic game of baseball can rest easier than football fans. Baseball players get hurt, but violence is not a key component of their game. In football, several players are banging heads and risking at least subconcussions on every play.

Would Jesus have played or loved football? I am honestly not sure. But I am sure that true fans do not watch the game primarily to see spectacular hits or the mangling of bodies. What's exciting is the long pass, the almost impossible fingertip catch, the stealthy interception. Consider especially the long run or kickoff return, when the runner's ability to dodge tackles provides the frisson. At such moments it's clear that what fans really love is not the collision but the avoidance of a collision. As McGrath puts it, "Averted danger is the essence of football." I'll keep watching football not because of the game's violence, but because of its instances of (barely) avoided violence. That's what gives the game its beauty and its thrills.

Fans do not watch the game primarily to see the mangling of bodies.

everything. There's plenty to be cynical about when ostensibly amateur players get recruited as if they were professionals. Even a straight arrow like Ohio State coach Jim Tressel turns out to have run a fairly smarmy program. Yet it's not primarily the financially shady elements that make me ambivalent about my favorite sport. It's the sometimes dangerous levels of violence.

I played football in high school, the eight-man version practiced in rural areas of

smashed my nose. Subsequent surgery removed about half of the cartilage from my broken, clogged snout. The flat nose that I have sported ever since is not my natural nose but a product of football.

Current concerns about football concentrate on the prevalence of head injuries, especially the concussions and subconcussions that players routinely sustain. Medical science has found that "getting your bell rung" is more serious than once was thought. Long-lasting and

Further rule changes have tried to lessen the physical dangers to players. (It may not be long before linemen squat like sumo wrestlers rather than stand in three-point stances.) Equipment changes, such as the introduction of faceguards to helmets, have also helped reduce injuries. But no rule or equipment changes will eliminate all the violence from a sport that is based on knocking people down. I will have to

Rodney Clapp's Soundings column appears in every other issue.

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Each Blade of Grass, by Margaret Kyle

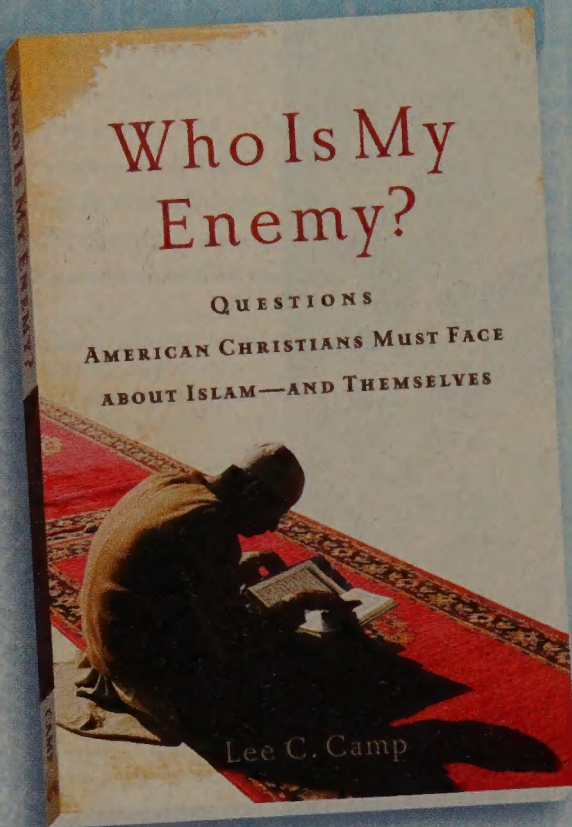
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a distant shore, make full the circle of God. — Keri Wehlander*

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—Lois Huey-Heck

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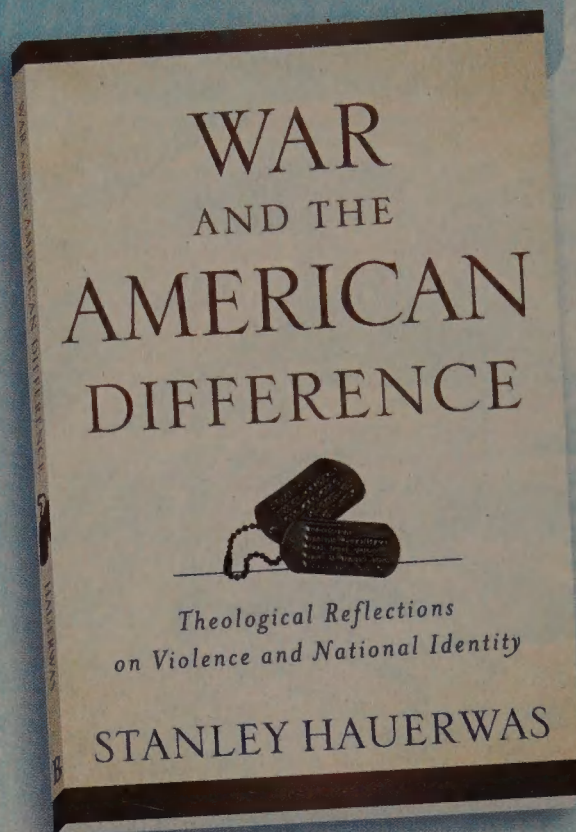
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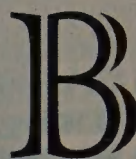
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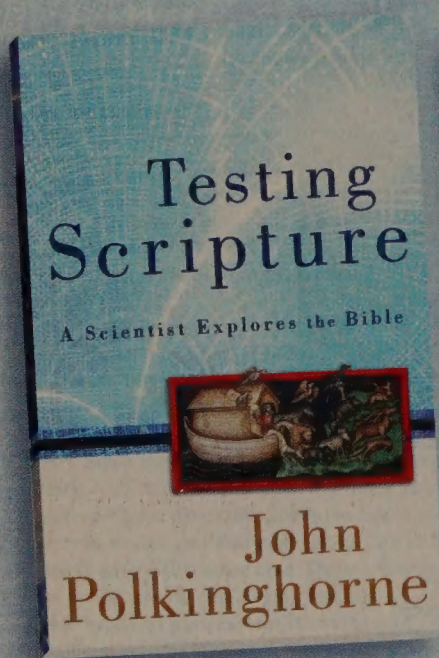
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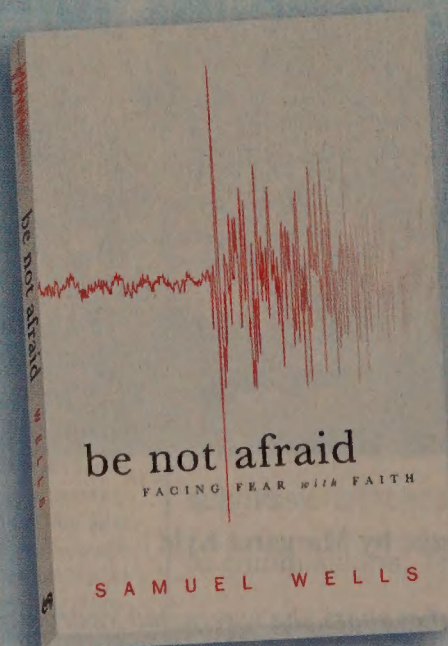

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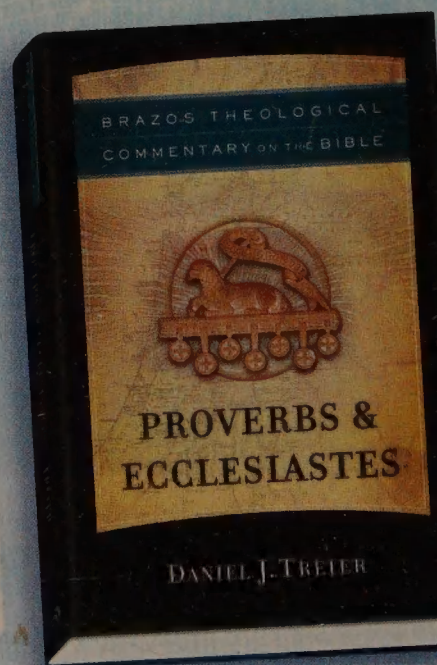
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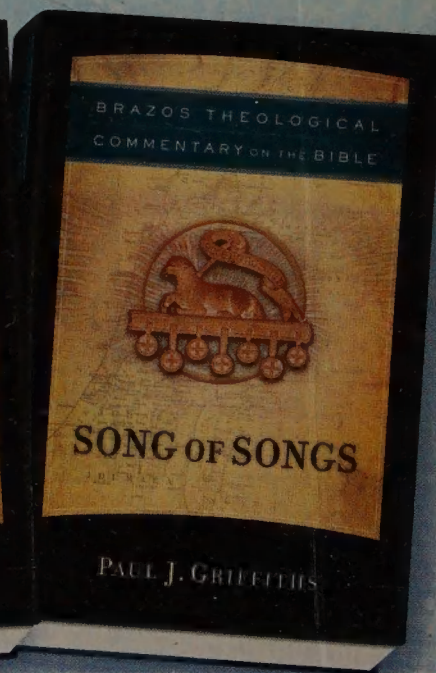
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